

PLUCK AND LUCK

COMPLETE
STORIES OF ADVENTURE.

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WATER = LOGGED:

OR, LOST IN THE SEA OF GRASS.

By CAPT THOS. H. WILSON.



"Lie there, you skulking coward!" he hissed as he folded Mabel to his breast. "I owe no duty to such as you, and better had it been your body which the sea swallowed up than our captain's."

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CHAPTER I.

THE WRECK OF THE SUNSHINE

The air was hot and murky, the sea was like molten glass, the sun appeared as a brazen disk in the heavens, and the ship scarcely moved.

The sails hung in loose folds from the yards, the wind had died away till not the faintest breath could be felt, and all the sea seemed dead.

The sailors sought the shade, the man at the helm stood idle at his post, the chief officer sat at the cabin door half asleep, while the skipper scanned the horizon and occasionally sent some one below to look at the glass and report any changes that might take place.

The timber ship Sunshine, Captain Eliphalet Howard, Master, bound to New York by the way of Good Hope, from Australia, was lying becalmed south of the cape, which she had rounded the night before.

They had had good luck until now, and indeed no one knew but that they would come safely out of the present danger, though many doubted it.

The calm had lasted for an hour or more, and as yet there had been no perceptible change in the glass, which was usually quick to report any disturbances in the air.

The heat was oppressive, and the slightest exertion produced exhaustion, the very air seeming to be heated in a furnace and to have lost all its invigorating power.

"Go below, Ken, my lad," said the skipper, presently, to a handsome young fellow of eighteen, who stood leaning against the main-mast. "Go below and look at the glass again. There must certainly be some change. This oppressiveness in the air cannot but mean something."

"Ay, ay, sir!" the young sailor answered, as he walked toward the cabin door.

"What's the matter?" asked the mate, starting up as the young fellow approached.

"That's what I am sent to see, sir," answered the other. "The captain wants me to look at the glass."

"The glass is all right," muttered the mate, resuming his seat on a tool-chest at the side of the door. "This is nothing but a calm, and it'll be over soon."

"I must obey orders, at any rate," said the youth; and he passed the mate and descended the companionway leading to the cabin.

Kenneth Gordon was a young fellow who had determined to make the sea his home, and to follow it until he could command a ship of his own.

He admired and respected Captain Howard, but between him and the mate, Mr. Stillwater, there had never been the best understanding, though there had never been any open rupture, as the young man had been taught to always obey those whom circumstances had placed above him.

He did not feel, however, in this instance that the mate had any right to interfere with him, and he therefore proceeded to do as the captain had requested.

The mate scowled and seemed about to call the young fellow back, but the captain said, quietly:

"I sent him below, Mr. Stillwater, and I am supposed to know the reason for everything I do."

Ken heard nothing of this, having proceeded at once to the captain's room, where there was a barometer hanging against the wall.

One glance at the instrument showed the youth that great changes had taken place.

The glass was falling rapidly, and at a rate that showed a more than common change in the atmosphere.

"I thought so," muttered Ken, as he watched the glass for a few moments. "I do not believe the other will show a change."

Then he hurried away, pausing a moment in the common room at the foot of the companionway.

This was used by everybody aft and was supplied with a table, chairs and lockers, being a sort of ante-room to the others.

Here was where the officers ate their meals, sat in the evening, reading or engaged in various amusements, and where the crew stated any grievances they might have.

In this room, facing the stairs, there hung a chronometer, a barometer, and other nautical instruments—these being the ones generally consulted.

Ken glanced at the barometer and saw that it registered no change, although that in the captain's room showed a great alteration in the atmospheric conditions.

"I thought as much," he again muttered, examining the instrument more closely. "It has been tampered with in some way; how, I do not understand, but so as to deceive us as to the true state of the weather."

Then he hurried upon deck, the mate meeting him with a black look, and demanding:

"What were you doing down there so long? Does it take you all that time to look at a glass which you can see from the companion?"

"The glass is falling very rapidly, sir," said Ken, addressing the skipper, however, and not the mate, the latter scowling at him from beneath the brim of his straw hat.

"It is? It was not falling when you looked, Mr. Stillwater."

"No, nor is it now," muttered the mate. "What does a green sailor know about instruments?"

"The glass is falling, sir," said Ken, firmly. "I examined the one in your room. The one in the steerage is out of order and will not register."

The captain looked at the mate and then at Ken, with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Take in all sail, Mr. Stillwater," he said, and at the next moment he hurried below.

He first glanced at the barometer in the outer cabin, and then hastened to his own room where he found a considerable difference in the register of the two instruments.

"It's just as Ken said," he muttered, "but how did he think to come here? He must have known that the other barometer was wrong."

"Is there any change in the weather, father?" asked a sweet voice at that moment, as a lovely, young girl entered the room.

"Yes, Mabel, child, there are great changes, and I fear that we are in danger. Do not venture upon deck till I call you."

Then the captain hurried upon deck where his orders were being obeyed as rapidly as possible.

Mabel Howard, the skipper's daughter, was the sole comfort of her father, as he had no other children, and his wife had been dead several years, the girl herself being about seventeen, and just budding into perfect womanhood.

For a few years previous she had accompanied her father on his voyages and knew much more about the management of a ship than it would be supposed a woman would care or could acquire the knowledge of.

She treated every one on board with equal courtesy, but had entertained a cordial dislike of the first officer, Mr. Stillwater, though she treated him as she did all the rest.

While she was courteous to all the sailors, she seemed to treat Ken Gordon with rather more consideration than the rest, and it was a matter of common report among the fore-cast men that Master Kenneth and pretty Miss Mabel would some day make a match of it.

As Captain Howard hurried on deck he saw that his orders had been obeyed not an instant too soon, and that even now it might be too late to save the ship.

From a dead calm it had suddenly changed to a gale, with the wind blowing from all quarters at once, as it seemed, the sky becoming as black as ink, the waters heaving and surging, and the ship now driving ahead as though bound to her destruction.

Suddenly from out the black darkness all about them there

shot a ball of fire, and at once there came a crash that seemed to shake the very foundations of the earth itself.

The ship was struck by lightning.

The mainmast was shivered from top to bottom, and fell across deck, heeling the vessel over upon her beam ends.

At the same moment she was seen to be on fire aloft, the flames making their way rapidly toward the deck.

Captain Howard had been struck by a fragment of the fallen mast and now lay on the deck insensible.

"Make ready the boats!" cried the mate. "We are on fire!"

Ken sprang to the captain's side, knelt beside him and lifted his head.

There was an ugly cut upon it, and the blood oozed slowly out upon his temple, though not a sound escaped his pale lips.

He seemed to be still breathing, but his eyes were closed, and he did not attempt to speak even when Ken asked him how he felt.

"Never mind him, Gordon!" growled the mate, as he passed. "If he lives we can put him in a boat, and if he dies he can stay here. There's no time to fool over him now."

To this heartless speech Ken made no reply, but hastily arose and hurried to the cabin.

"Where are you going?" demanded Stillwater.

"To tell Miss Mabel that her father is injured, and that we must take to the boats."

"Go about your work and do what you can. Never mind fussing over women and dead men. You'll be lucky if you get away alive."

At that moment, however, Mabel herself appeared, seeming to know at once that something had happened.

She looked around, missed the sound of her father's voice, did not see him at his accustomed post, and knew in an instant that he was dead or dying.

"Where is my father?" she cried. "Tell me the truth, Ken, for you know it. I can see it in your face."

"Forward," said Ken. "He was struck by the mast."

"Come with me," she said, and hurried toward the spot where her father lay dying, or dead, perhaps, even at that moment.

As she did so a monstrous wave suddenly swept across the decks, breaking down the weather rail and carrying everything before it.

Ken saw the danger, leaped forward, seized Mabel in his arms and sprang into the rigging, escaping the rush of waters by the merest chance.

In a moment the ship righted, for the surging waters had carried away the wreck of the main-mast with all its accompanying rubbish, and swept the deck clean of everything in their mad rush, the body of the unfortunate skipper being borne out upon the flood to its ocean grave, never again to be looked upon by human eyes.

His troubles were over, and had those who survived him known of the trials and hardships before them, they might well have shrunk from the ordeal and wished that the sea might swallow them up at once and forever.

CHAPTER II.

A CONFLICT OF AUTHORITY

"Lower away the boats, there! All hands stand by to leave the ship!"

Thus cried Mr. Stillwater in an interval of calm, not long after the sudden death of the skipper.

The men had been busily engaged in filling the boats with water, provisions and other things necessary for a long voyage, and one or two were all ready to be launched.

One of the boats had been carried away, and another badly

damaged at the time of the falling of the mast. So that there were but four left, and one of these was little better than a skiff.

Meanwhile the flames, caused by the lightning, had extended until there seemed no hope that the vessel would survive.

"Lower away!" cried the mate, and two of the boats descended to the water, the men pulling away so as to avoid being swamped in case the sea were again to rise and force them against the side of the ship.

"Go below, Ken, and look after the instruments," said the mate. "We must take 'em along."

"Ay, ay, sir;" and Ken hastened to obey the order.

"Into the larger boat with you, Miss Mabel," said Stillwater. "You will be under my charge now."

"I will wait till Ken comes back," answered the girl, quietly, standing by the cabin door.

"You will wait for no one!" hissed the mate. "Do as I say. I am master here now. Your master as well as of the sailors!"

Mabel remained in her position, and the mate strode toward her, angrily, not noticing that the sailors were launching the third boat at that moment.

"You will obey me hereafter!" he hissed, as he seized the girl by the arm. "Get into the boat!"

"Ken! Help!" cried Mabel.

In an instant Ken was on deck.

He saw Mabel struggling in the mate's grasp, saw the look of evil passion on the officer's face, forgot all differences of rank in a second, and, leaping forward, felled the man to the deck at a blow.

"Lie there, you skulking coward!" he hissed, as he folded Mabel to his breast. "I owe no duty to such as you, and better had it been your body which the sea swallowed up than our captain's."

At that moment a cry of warning came from the boats.

"Ahoy, there! The sea is rising; the flames are spreading. Make haste and leave the ship!"

Ken looked at the prostrate form of the mate, and, for an instant, a wicked thought came into his heart.

He could abandon the man to his fate and be rid of his persecutions forever.

For an instant only did he think thus, and then he turned to a young fellow of his own age, who had not yet left the ship, and said:

"Here, Bert, you and Dink help me get Mr. Stillwater into the boat."

Dink Bight was an able seaman, a natural genius and a queer character besides, but a firm friend withal, and one who, once trusted, would never betray the faith placed in him.

At that instant there came a second blinding flash and then a peal of thunder more violent than the last.

In another instant a mighty wave rushed upon the ship, the line holding the third boat parted, and in a moment she was lost in the darkness.

Then the rain began to descend in torrents and the flames which had threatened to destroy the ship were extinguished, leaving the rail and stumps of masts blackened and burned, but luckily still sound.

Down poured the rain in a ceaseless flood, and all the air seemed saturated, the very floodgates of heaven being opened.

The darkness grew more intense, for night was now coming on, and with it the promise of storm and wreck.

The waves still ran high, despite the rain, and nothing could be seen of the boats, their fate being a mystery to those still on board the ship.

Ken led Mabel to the cabin, where he lighted the lamps and bade her be of good cheer, assuring her that they would be eventually rescued, and that there was no occasion for alarm.

Then he put on an oil-skin coat and sou'wester hat, lighted

a couple of lanterns and returned to the deck, which seemed to be deserted.

"Ahoy, there! Is any one alive?" he shouted.

"Ay, ay!" answered Bert Ransom. "It's a good thing you have brought a light, for we might have walked overboard in this pitch darkness."

"He's brought a light, most welcome sight, and now the night is very bright, and in our might we'll take a bite!" cried a cheery voice.

"Hallo, is that you, Dink?" cried Ken. "You are still alive, it seems?"

Dink was greatly given to rhyming, and could not say a simple sentence without jingling a lot of words together, a habit which had resulted in giving him the name of the poet among his fellows.

"Oh, yes, I'm here, don't you fear; you'll find me near when you need good cheer," answered the rhymster.

"Where's Mr. Stillwater?" asked Ken, as he walked forward, looking for a place to hang a lantern.

"Don't know," said Bert. "I have not seen him since the rain began."

"You fellows had better go and get on oilskins," said Ken. "You'll be soaked through if you don't. I never saw such a rain. It will take down the sea, though, and that's one comfort."

"It's a heavy rain, that's plain, and it will calm the raging main, and then the sun will shine again with all its might and main," retorted Dink, as he went off to the fore-castle.

"Dink, you're a rattle-head!" laughed Bert, as he followed the poet.

Ken now secured one lantern to a pin on the weather-rail, and then, passing up forward, suspended the other to the outer jib-stays, the sail being down and hanging over the boom.

The rain poured down without cessation, and, as nothing could be done in the darkness, Ken proposed that they make themselves as comfortable as possible until morning.

There was no sail up on the ship, and they appeared to be drifting, though in what direction it was impossible to tell.

Ken went aft to light the binnacle lamp, but here he found that both compasses had been removed, so that their course could not be determined.

Going into the cabin, where he knew there was another compass over the captain's bed, he discovered that this had fallen from its place and was now utterly useless.

"Heaven only knows where we are drifting, then," he mused. "Perhaps there is a small compass in the other boat, but if there is not, we will have to go by the sun and stars."

"How many of us are there now, Ken?" asked Mabel, as the young fellow came into the general room, where she sat, sewing.

"Well, there's you and me, and Bert and Dink Bight, for certain, and the mate must be somewhere about."

"You struck him down. Aren't you afraid he was washed overboard?"

"Not he. He wasn't born to be drowned, Miss Mabel."

"Do not anger him, Ken, for he is a bad man, and would do you any injury of which he was capable."

"I'm not afraid," said Ken, lightly, although he determined at the same time to be on his guard against the fellow, whom he mistrusted as much as he disliked.

"He is commander here now, Ken, you know," added Mabel, "and you must do as he says."

"I do not recognize his command," returned Ken. "We have no crew, and the ship is so disabled that we can do nothing with it. We are all equal here, and I am as much a captain as Dan Stillwater."

"You are, hey?" and Stillwater himself descended the companionway and entered the cabin at that very moment.

Ken made no reply, and Stillwater continued:

"You will find that I am master here, my lad, and you'd better impress that upon your mind as soon as convenient. Now, clear out and go into the forecabin, if you want to keep dry."

"I have no particular objection to the forecabin," said Ken, with a laugh, "but I don't acknowledge your authority, and I will not. You are simply here, like the rest of us, a castaway. You failed to wreck the ship once, and I do not intend to let you have a second chance."

"What do you mean?" hissed Stillwater, turning livid.

"I mean that you tampered with the glass; that you meant to wreck the vessel and abandon the captain; that you took away, or disabled, every good compass on board, and that it was your intention to suddenly leave and abandon the skipper upon a vessel which you considered already doomed."

"How dare you?" snarled the other, advancing.

"Instead of that," Ken went on, "you yourself have been abandoned and must float with the currents and drift with the winds, wherever God wills. Had you done your duty, I would have been glad to obey you; but now you are no more than any of us."

"No, and he ain't as much, if I know anything," said Dink, coming into the cabin.

"Go on deck, you fool!" muttered the mate.

"Excuse me, sir, I ain't a fool, and I've been to school and know the rule, and you're a mule if you think I'll be a tool, and there's reason as well as rhyme for you."

"I hope you understand us, Mr. Stillwater," added Bert, who now joined the party. "It is every man for the whole now, and not each for himself. We can't trust you to be captain, and so we have concluded to have none."

"'Cause we know you," concluded Dink. "Your plans didn't work, and you can't shirk out o' that. The rudder's gone, boys, and we're just drifting anywhere. There ain't no compass, and we couldn't steer if we had one. We're just adrift, and it's a mercy that it ain't no wuss, and that's sense if it doesn't jingle."

"You're all a pack of idiots!" snarled Stillwater, and, turning upon his heel, he went into his own room and bolted the door, remaining secluded till morning.

CHAPTER III.

LOST IN THE SEA OF GRASS

When the day dawned it was apparent to all upon the wrecked vessel that Dink had spoken the truth.

They were "just drifting anywhere," of a truth, and that was all that could be said.

Their rudder was gone, they were nearly dismayed, they had no means of ascertaining their position, and they were totally at the mercy of the winds and waves.

The storm had subsided, but the current was bearing them in a northerly direction, and they hoped to run across other ships before long, as they were still in the track of vessels bound to England, as they fondly believed.

Since the outburst of the previous night the mate had said nothing, and when he appeared late the next morning he had still but little to say, and that in surly tones, as though he were brooding over the past.

Had not Ken been so certain of Stillwater's intended treachery, he would not have defied the man so openly; but he felt sure of his position, and the mate's subsequent conduct proved that the young sailor was right.

Although it was not possible to direct the course of the ship, it was still a place of refuge and would remain intact for a long time, being stanch and well built and not materially injured so far as her floating was concerned.

She was well provisioned, also, there being an abundance of preserved meats and vegetables, and a liberal supply of fresh water on board, so that there was no immediate danger of starvation.

There was one small boat still remaining, but, considering the uncertainty of their position and the lack of means to ascertain it, the ship was a safer place than the boat, and none of the castaways gave a second thought to the question of leaving the vessel and trusting themselves to the mercies of the ocean in a small boat.

During the first few days Stillwater remained in his room, coming out only at rare intervals for the purpose of satisfying his hunger or thirst, and saying nothing to his comrades in trouble.

During this time, Ken, Bert and Dink had repaired the break in the bulwarks, had rigged up a temporary mast upon which a light could be suspended at night, and had made a tour of the hold, satisfying themselves that there were no dangerous leaks and that everything was in good condition above and below.

One man was always on watch at night, for they had not yet given up the idea of a rescue, and recognized the necessity of keeping a good lookout.

Mabel established herself in the galley as chief cook, for she insisted that she ought to do something, and that this was the work for which she was best fitted.

"I don't care who is captain," she declared, with a laugh, "but I am going to be the cook. I don't want first place, but I will take the second."

"I've read in a book that the captain and cook were the first on the hook," remarked Dink, in his characteristic style. "Her position she's took, so let her be cook."

At the end of three or four days Stillwater came out of his room one morning, and, approaching the group around the table, it being the breakfast hour, said:

"Come, boys, let us be friends. There's no knowing how long we may have to be on this old hulk together, and where's the use of living like cats and dogs?"

"I have no desire to do so, Mr. Stillwater," replied Ken, "and am satisfied to be on friendly terms with you if you wish it."

The others nodded assent to this, and the mate replied:

"You were not as respectful to me as I thought right the other day, but we will let that go and say no more about it. You probably thought you were in the right. Maybe you were and maybe you wasn't; it don't matter which, now, so let's call a truce and try and live harmoniously."

"That suits me," said Ken, briefly.

"I'm satisfied," added Bert.

"So am I, and let us try to live and die in unity," remarked Dink, who could not overcome his propensity for rhyming, even when there was no occasion for any long speeches.

Mabel said nothing, tacitly consenting to the truce, but at the same time deciding not to trust the former mate too far.

"What do you think?" said Ken to Bert, in the afternoon as they sat together on the windlass well up forward. "Do you think he means mischief, and wants to lure us into fancied security?"

"Stillwater, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I would not trust him out of my sight. However, it is as well to be on terms of neutrality with him, for the present, at all events."

"My own idea. I wanted to see if you thought the same."

"I know that Dink does, and Mabel, though she says nothing, is as much on her guard as any of us."

"I have noticed it," said Ken, musingly; "and now what do you think of our position? Where are we drifting?"

"To the north and west, as near as I can judge."

"Then we ought to strike land at Gibraltar or thereabouts."

"Yes, if the current does not carry us still further away."

"To be sure," muttered Ken, "if we get into the equatorial current, we might drift clear across the ocean and into the Gulf of Mexico. That's a long voyage."

There was a longer one before them, however, although they knew it not.

Days merged into weeks, and nearly two months had passed from the time they were abandoned, when one day Ken, upon coming on deck, looked around and saw great masses of gulf weed floating on the water as far as he could see.

The vessel moved slowly along, sometimes appearing to be immovable, and again making just enough progress to be noticeable.

"What place is this, for heaven's sake?" cried the young sailor.

"It is the sea of grass, and we are forever lost!"

Ken turned and saw Stillwater leaning against the rail.

"The sea of grass!" echoed Ken, in surprise.

"Yes; the famed Sargasso Sea of the Atlantic—bigger than the whole of Europe, and a regular dead sea in the bargain."

"We have drifted out of the main current," said Bert, coming up at that moment, "and are now in the slack water. The Lord only knows how long we may have to stay here. If we strike a calm belt it may be years before we leave it."

"Don't vessels ever come this way?"

"No," said Stillwater, gloomily. "They know better. The place is out of all the highways of ocean travel. I would rather have died than be here. Our vessel will rot and go to pieces before we can hope to leave this accursed spot."

"Call no place accursed that heaven has created," said Ken, solemnly, and no more was said.

The prospect was cheerless enough, and as the days passed it became more so.

All around them was a sea of grass, the water being covered, sometimes to a depth of three or four feet, with floating weed which grew and flourished on the bosom of the deep and afforded life to millions of little creatures, crabs, fishes, snails and other tiny denizens of the great deep, while now and then the larger and more important inhabitants of the ocean made their appearance.

One day, when they had been in this weird region for several weeks and had seen nothing worth mentioning, Bert was greatly surprised, upon the rising of the sun, to see a large ship, very old and dilapidated, within a short distance of their own vessel.

Calling his companions, he suggested that they pay a visit to the old hulk and see if she contained anything worth keeping, a proposition which all readily assented to.

Accordingly, the whole party embarked in the boat, and Ken and Bert rowed, Mabel sitting in the stern to steer, and Dink being in the bow, ready to make fast when they reached the strange vessel.

A few minutes' row brought them alongside, and Ken directed Dink to board the stranger at the bow, the rail being entirely broken away at that point.

Dink, Stillwater and Bert first ascended to the deck, and then Ken helped Mabel up, and the whole party stood where no living man had set foot for years.

What a sight awaited them!

The place was literally strewn with skeletons—some resting against the stumps of masts, others lying prone upon the deck, while some lay in the scuppers, half crumbled to dust.

Some wore scanty rags which scarcely covered the decaying bones, while others were exposed to the full glare of the sun, which had bleached them to a dazzling whiteness.

All around were the signs of death and decay—omens of what the newcomers into this desolate region might expect—nay, be certain to meet.

"What a sight!" muttered Ken. "It gives me the horrors!"

"I told you it was the sea of the dead," returned Stillwater.

"King Death reigns supreme, and these are his ministers. They are smiling upon you. Go and return their cordial greeting."

Ken turned away in disgust, but Bert said, cheerfully:

"While life lasts hope remains, and I will yet live to tell of the wonderful things we saw while lost in the sea of grass. Come, let us explore this old hulk."

CHAPTER IV.

ON BOARD THE PELICAN

It was a strange sight that the castaways gazed upon, as strange as its surroundings.

The sun just rising over the sea of grass, those floating meadows upon which no foot might tread, the old, time-battered wreck and the skeletons which lay all around, the sole tenants of the rotting hulk.

Mabel unconsciously seized Ken by the hand, as if seeking protection; Stillwater mumbled something under his breath; Bert and Ken showed surprise, while Dink softly whistled as he looked to see if the boat in which they had come over from their ship was secure.

"What a dreadful sight!" murmured Mabel. "Come away, Ken. Might we not take some awful disease from being here?"

"I hardly think so," said Ken. "By the looks of things, these skeletons have been here a good many years, as some, you can see, have crumbled into dust."

"Into dust, as all of us must, and crumble like rust, or a cask what's bust," said that inveterate rhymester Dink, coming forward.

"Suppose we take a look over the old hulk," again suggested Bert. "We ought to find something interesting."

Ken was about to acquiesce in this proposal when Mabel said, quickly:

"No, Ken, don't. I am sure something will happen."

"Why, there is no danger," said Ken. "The skeletons cannot hurt us, and there is nothing else."

Stillwater stood by the broken rail gazing irresolutely on the weird sight, when Dink, walking toward one of the groups of skeletons, stooped down, picked up something bright, and, approaching Ken and Bert, said:

"Here is gold, and it's awfully old, and if you'd been told, you'd've thought you were sold, but if I may be so bold, I say it's good gold, and a hundred years old."

With that he handed a broad and still shining gold piece to Ken who took it, examined it, and said:

"Why, the date on this coin is more than a hundred years ago. What sort of money is it, I wonder?"

"Seems to be Spanish," replied Bert, who was looking at the coin.

Stillwater suddenly threw off the spell that seemed to be upon him, and hurried toward the skeletons.

He stooped over one that lay well down in the scuppers, fumbled about it for a few moments, and then came toward Ken, his right hand extended, and, in the open palm, half a dozen coins similar to the one which Dink had found.

"I have made a haul, too," he exclaimed. "These are doubloons, and worth nearly twenty dollars apiece. Remember, if there is any more treasure on board, I have the largest share, because I am captain."

"We'll share and share alike, my beauty," said Dink. "Share and share, is just what's fair, so have a care, that you act on the square."

"Hold your tongue, you idiot!" growled Stillwater. "It's get what you can, and keep all you get, in a case like this."

Thereupon he returned to the larger group of skeletons and began rudely turning them over, stripping off the rags which covered them and searching, fiercely, for more gold.

Mabel shuddered and turned away her head, still holding fast to Ken's hand, the latter making no disguise of the disgust he felt at the mate's heartless greed.

While Stillwater was thus engaged, Bert and Dink went aft and descended to the cabin, the doors of which stood open.

"Only three more," muttered Stillwater, as he dropped the gold pieces into his pocket, with a jingling sound. "There ought to be more than that. Let us search the old hulk. This is only an aggravation. There must be plenty below, since the common sailors were so well provided."

"I think we had better return to the ship and get breakfast first," returned Ken. "This vessel is not going to float away."

"We can have breakfast any time," muttered the other, "but this old hulk may fall to pieces at any minute. She's so rotten now that it's a wonder she floats."

He started toward the cabin as he spoke, but at that moment Bert and Dink reappeared.

Dink had a bar of gold, over a foot in length and three or four inches square, in his hands, while Bert carried a large, leather-covered book, with brass corners and clasps.

"I've got the log book of this ship, the Pelican, of New Orleans!" cried Bert.

"And I've got a fortune!" added Dink, displaying his bar of gold. "There's enough in this to make fifty of your doubloons."

Stillwater's eyes glistened and he muttered some unintelligible words under his breath as he dashed past Dink and Bert and rushed down the cabin steps.

"He won't find any more, and I guess he'll feel sore," remarked Dink, "for we've got the whole store and there ain't any more."

"Come away," said Mabel to Ken. "Didn't you hear what he said? This old wreck may fall to pieces under our feet at any minute."

"Hardly so soon as that, my dear," laughed Ken. "However, I think we might as well go and get something to eat before we do anything else."

"There's no more gold in the cabin," said Bert. "We found this bar on the table in the captain's room. I glanced over some of the last entries in the log and it seems to me that they spoke of having lost the bulk of the treasure."

"How did they get it?" asked Ken, becoming interested.

"They ran across an ancient treasure ship, but for some reason or other did not succeed in transferring her wealth to their own ship."

"This will make interesting reading," said Ken, musingly. "How old is the log?"

"It is dated in 1790, nearly sixty years ago."

"Sixty years! I wonder there is anything left of these bodies."

"They crumble to dust if you touch them," returned Bert. "There was one below, and Dink brushed against it—"

"Yes, sir, and away it went into ten thousand pieces," interrupted Dink; "and now it's nothing but a heap of dust, it's clean gone to bust and smells like must."

At this moment Stillwater came on deck, his face inflamed with passion.

"Give me that bar!" he said, angrily, to Dink. "It is mine, by right of my office."

"And mine by right of possession. I'll make no concession and you needn't make intercession, for it's my profession to keep it in my possession," replied Dink, in the most tantalizing manner.

"Are you going back to the ship?" asked Ken, quietly. "We are."

"No!" hissed the man. "I am going to stay here. You can send the boat over for me when I hail you."

"We will if it's convenient, and if it isn't you'll have to wait," answered Dink, provokingly. "This ferry is run to suit the people, not the nob's."

Stillwater growled out something that sounded like an imprecation, took a short pipe, half full of tobacco, from his coat-pocket, lighted it, and returned to the hold of the old ship, a cloud of smoke floating behind him.

"He's taking his breakfast in the form of a smoke," said Bert, with a smile. "He evidently intends to be busy for some time."

"Let him alone," mused Ken. "While he's thus engaged he won't be plotting mischief, and I believe that he does little else."

"You won't send the boat back with only one man in it, will you?" asked Mabel, apprehensively.

"If we do we will send one that can take care of himself," replied Ken. "We know too much of Dan Stillwater to put up with any of his nonsense."

Bert now dropped into the boat. Ken helped Mabel to her place in the stern, and then Dink followed, cast off the warp, took up his oars and pulled toward the Sunshine, which looked stancher than ever, now that they had been aboard the Pelican.

"Home again," said Ken, as he helped Mabel to reach the deck.

"Home!" repeated the girl.

"Aye, and the only one we are likely to have for some time to come," he answered.

"But not the only one for all time, Ken?" she asked, anxiously.

"I cannot tell," replied the young fellow. "At any rate it is a comfortable one, and we might be much worse off than we are."

Mabel hurried to the galley to get breakfast, Dink lighting the fire, Bert getting the water for the coffee, and Ken setting the table in the cabin.

The meal was prepared and eaten, the table cleared and the cabin put to rights, and still there had been no signal from Stillwater.

He prepared and ate his own meals in his own way, and at his own convenience, however, and consequently there was no reason why he need leave the Pelican to return to his quarters in the forecastle, which he now preferred to the cabin.

"Now, then," said Ken, as he lighted his pipe, and sat on a chest in the shade of the house on deck, "suppose, Bert, that we have the log of the Pelican?"

"Agreed," said Bert. "We'll take turns at reading, so that we can all have a chance to smoke."

"Oh, you slaves to habit!" cried Mabel, merrily, as she ran into the cabin and caught up the old, leather-bound volume. "Let me read, and then you can all smoke."

"A sensible idea," said Bert, laughing, and then, when all had seated themselves in comfortable positions, the skipper's daughter began to read the log of the Pelican.

CHAPTER V.

A THRILLING NARRATIVE

The ship Pelican, Matthew Underhill, Master, left New Orleans, Louisiana, during the latter part of November, 1790, for England, with a miscellaneous cargo, having a crew of twenty men all told.

Everything went well until they had left the gulf and began following the Gulf Stream on its way north.

Then it was suddenly discovered that one of the sailors

had been suffering with the yellow fever at the start, and that it had all at once developed in an alarming degree.

Two days afterward the man died in terrible agony, and was buried almost immediately, the sea being his grave, the crested wave his headstone.

All proper precautions had been taken, it was supposed, to prevent the spread of the disease, but on the day following poor Brodhead's burial another of the foremast hands was down with the dread disease.

He was a powerful fellow, with a constitution of iron, and it seemed, after a while, that he would recover, and Captain Underhill began to hope that there would be no more new cases.

It was a vain hope, however, for the sailor took a relapse from becoming chilled and died within a day; the second mate, Mr. Secor, who had nursed him, being attacked by the dread malady on the day after the seaman's death.

The Pelican then met a succession of adverse gales during which she was driven far out of her course, the crew being unable to attend properly to their duties.

Mr. Secor died and then three fresh cases appeared simultaneously; the ship, all this time, being at the mercy of the winds.

The three men died within a few hours of each other, and several more, including the mate and the steward, were taken sick and were unable to attend to their duties.

The foremast was blown out of the vessel by the violence of the wind, and the inability of the crew to shorten sail at a critical moment, and at one time it seemed as though all hands would be lost.

They managed to clear away the rubbish and get the ship on an even keel, but there were worse times to come and they had not yet seen the half of their troubles.

At last the gales subsided and a calm succeeded, and with it the fever again made its appearance.

Captain Underhill was as yet superior to the attack of the disease, taking every precaution against it and succeeding for a long time.

More than two-thirds of those still alive were down with the fever, however, and it seemed to be only a question of time when they would all succumb.

At this juncture a strange incident occurred.

The wind suddenly sprang up one night and blew a living gale, the ship driving, no one knew whither.

In the morning another vessel was sighted, scudding under bare poles, a few miles to the north.

Captain Underhill signaled her, but received no answer, and, in a short time, came up with her.

Not a soul was seen on her decks, and in answer to the skipper's hail there was no response.

She seemed very old and of antique build, even for those times, and the superstitious sailors declared her to be the dreaded Flying Dutchman.

The gale had considerably abated, and Captain Underhill ordered a boat lowered and went with four of his men over to the strange vessel.

Not a soul was found on board, but many strange discoveries were made.

The stranger proved to be the Santa Felicia, a Spanish treasure ship, and, from her log, she had already been floating about the ocean for nearly forty years.

In her cabin were found two or three chests containing gold coin and gold in bars, while the hold contained treasure to a vast amount.

Captain Underhill returned to the Pelican with two or three purses filled with doubloons and two or three bars of gold, intending to transfer the remainder to his own ship as soon as a favorable opportunity occurred.

A hawser was carried over to the Santa Felicia, and made

fast, after considerable trouble, so that the treasure might not slip from the grasp of the Pelican.

Immense masses and fields of floating weed were now encountered, and the skipper, on taking an observation, discovered that he was on the lower edge of the Sargasso Sea and drifting deeper into it every hour.

The poor sailors were made frantic by visions of wealth, none of which were to be realized.

Man after man died and lay on the deck uncared for, none daring to remove the bodies through fear of infection.

Some of the poor fellows hugged the gold the captain had given them to their breasts, and cursed the fate which had fallen upon them.

One by one they died and remained unburied, the very air being tainted.

The hawser attached to the Santa Felicia parted one night, and the treasure ship drifted into the sea of grass, no one knew whither.

There was now not a man on board that was not affected by the fever, and of the crew of twenty, less than half that number remained alive.

The captain, as sick as the rest, did all he could to allay the sufferings of his men, but in vain.

He could not even bury the dead, and, at last, he, too, succumbed, being the last to die.

The last entry in his log book had evidently been made but a few hours previous to his death, for the words were written in a shaking hand and many were omitted, the final sentence ending abruptly.

Such was the story of the loss of the Pelican, and of the finding of the Santa Felicia.

The gold coin and the bar were proof enough of the truth of the story, and there could be no doubt that had it not been for the fatal malady which overtook them, Captain Underhill and his crew would have returned home, rich beyond their wildest dreams.

"And this ancient vessel is still floating about the sea of grass, lost like ourselves," said Bert, when Mabel had finished reading.

"The Pelican, you mean?" asked Ken.

"The Pelican! No, indeed; but the Santa Felicia, with all that immense treasure on board. We must find her, old man, and our fortunes are made."

"My dear fellow, do you think how long that vessel must have been floating to be still intact?"

"Yes; about a hundred years."

"And you think you are going to find her after all that lapse of time?"

"Why not, Ken? The Pelican has been knocking about for sixty years. The Santa Felicia was of stouter build, undoubtedly, for these old vessels were built for warlike purposes, and not for simple mercantile business. They were armed and had to be made strong."

"And you think she is still afloat?"

"It seems reasonable enough, doesn't it?"

"Granting that she is, how are you going to find her?"

"Why, she is in the sea of grass like ourselves. It is the likeliest thing in the world that we should run across her."

"You don't seem to reckon upon the immensity of this same sea of grass, my dear boy. It covers an area of hundreds and hundreds of thousands of square miles."

Bert opened his eyes.

"Why, old chap, we might drift forever over its surface and not come across this old treasure ship," continued Ken.

"Well, we have fallen in with the Pelican," answered Bert, as a final and convincing argument, "and it is therefore just as likely that we will come across the Santa Felicia as well. In fact, I am assured of it."

"There's Stillwater yelling for some one to bring him over," said Dink, suddenly. "I suppose I might as well go after him."

"Yes," answered Ken, "but be wary, for he is in none of the best of tempers this morning, I fancy."

"That's nothing new," said Dink, with a shrug. "The good tempers had given out just about the time he came on deck. I ain't afraid of him, but I'll keep my weather eye open just the same, as long as you say so."

CHAPTER VI.

STILLWATER MAKES A FALSE CALCULATION

Stillwater was in an angry frame of mind when he returned to the Sunshine, and as soon as he stepped on board he said to Ken:

"I want my share of this treasure. The log book tells where it is concealed, and I demand to know the place. I ought to have an equal share, and I want it!"

"You wanted the whole of it a while ago," answered Ken. "Your tone has changed."

"Well, I'm satisfied to take my share. It is hidden in that old vessel, somewhere, and I want to know where."

"You are mistaken," said Bert. "Whatever treasure there was on the old vessel has been taken away. You have as much as any of us. What more do you want?"

"I want to know where that chest of gold bars is."

"There was none. Two or three bars only were brought over from the Santa Felicia."

"What is that?"

"The old Spanish vessel from which the treasure was taken. The bulk of it remained on board. You can read the log, and learn for yourself."

"You are lying to me," snarled Stillwater. "The treasure is on the Pelican, and you know where it is."

"Well, you are at liberty to ransack the Pelican from stem to stern, if you choose," said Ken. "Come, Bert, there is no use in arguing with a man like that."

"Do you want to see the Pelican's log?" asked Bert, holding out the ancient volume.

"No!" said Stillwater, walking forward and disappearing in the fore-castle.

The two vessels remained within easy distance of each other all day, though Ken made no attempt to keep the Pelican alongside.

There was nothing to be gained by this, for the young fellows were satisfied that there was no more treasure on board, and that they must find the Santa Felicia if they wished to recover the lost gold.

The day was spent as usual, and at night one man remained on watch, so as to arouse the others in case anything happened.

Ken was on deck from midnight until three o'clock, pacing up and down, smoking, singing or talking to himself from time to time in order to keep awake.

It was about two o'clock; the moon was just rising above the waste of waters and everything was still, when the young man thought he heard a strange sound in the hold.

The noise was almost under his feet, and sounded like some one striking with a heavy hammer or sledge.

"I wonder if that can be Stillwater?" he asked himself as the sound was repeated. "He can't be getting provisions for himself at this hour of the night."

Walking forward, he saw that the fore hatch was open, and, listening for a few moments, he heard some one moving about in the hold.

Presently he saw the glimmer of a light, and then heard a strange, grating sound which he could not account for.

He could not see Stillwater, although now and then he could hear some one moving about.

Going to the fore-castle he discovered that the former mate was not in his bunk, nor anywhere in sight.

Proceeding to the cabin, he found Bert and Dink asleep in their rooms.

"It is Stillwater, and he is up to some mischief," mused Ken, as he stood listening.

Raising half of the main hatch he lowered himself into the hold by means of a rope, and then walked forward, taking a passage that had been cleared for the convenience of the captain.

Great piles of timber, hewn and in the rough, were stacked on both sides of him, as high or higher than his head.

The cargo was a valuable one, being composed entirely of foreign woods, and might yet realize a handsome sum if it could be brought into port.

Suddenly, as he moved forward, Ken heard a sound as of water rushing out from some place where it had been confined.

"He can't be broaching a cask," muttered Ken. "There would be no necessity for breaking it open. Can he mean to let it run to waste, so as to cut short our supply? Oh, the miserable villain!"

Full of the thought of preventing this dastardly deed, Ken hurried forward, but suddenly paused, transfixed with horror.

In an open space, down at the side and not far from the keel, he saw Stillwater kneeling on the beams, a lantern being placed where it threw a strong light upon him.

He held a large augur in his hand and had just drawn it out, the end being wet.

The truth flashed upon Ken in an instant.

The man was scuttling the ship!

"Villain!" he hissed, as he dashed forward.

Stillwater sprang to his feet, kicked over the light and hurried away in the darkness that followed.

Ken groped around, trying to find the lantern, to relight it, and, as he was doing so, a jet of water struck him in the face.

It went into his mouth, and the salt taste showed him its source at once.

"Oh, the scoundrel!" he murmured, as he stepped back out of the way of the jet. "Was there ever such a wicked villain?"

Searching in his pocket for a match, he soon found one, struck it on his coat-sleeve and produced a tiny flame.

He did not see the lantern, but he did see that the water was rushing, in a perfect flood, through the auger-hole in the side of the vessel, well down by the keel.

It had been bored by running the auger down between two layers of planks and could not be reached, from where he stood, in order to be plugged up.

"The sound I heard was this scoundrel plugging up other holes he had made," mused Ken. "He meant to let the water force the plugs out in time, and make us believe that there was a leak."

At this moment the match in his fingers went out and he was left in darkness.

He had no more and he was therefore obliged to grope his way back to the main hatch, not a very serious task, as the road lay straight before him.

Reaching the hatch he climbed upon deck and at once awoke Dink and Bert, telling them what he had seen.

"I am afraid it will be impossible to stop the leak," he said, "for there are doubtless several other holes besides the one I discovered."

"We must do our best, at all events," answered Bert. "Let us go down and see how great the damage is, and if it can be remedied."

Procuring lanterns, the three friends went into the hold and made a careful survey of the place.

Besides the leak which Ken had found there were evidently others, as the sound of water rushing in at the side could be heard in several places.

The holes had been very adroitly placed, as in nearly every instance it was almost impossible to get at them, and in some cases they could not even be located, although it was very evident that they existed.

"What are we going to do?" asked Bert. "The water is coming in like a millrace, and the lower tiers are already flooded."

"We can do nothing," answered Ken. "Fortunately there is the Pelican. She will afford us a refuge. Stillwater has evidently been at this work for some time. It could not have been done in a single night."

"Why should he wish to scuttle the ship?" asked Bert. "He runs as great a danger as ourselves."

"No, for he would have stolen the boat and left us to perish. He is an infamous scoundrel."

"Well, I don't see how we can live on the Pelican. She is rotten, and will soon go to pieces."

"There isn't any occasion for going to live on her," remarked Dink, quietly.

"Where shall we live, then?" asked both boys, in a breath.

"Right here on our own ship."

"But she will go down before long. No vessel can last with the water pouring into her the way it is in this," said Bert. Dink only laughed.

"Dan Stillwater is a bigger fool than he looks. He'd better read more books, and not try to catch sharks with herring hooks," he remarked.

"What do you mean?" asked Ken.

"Well, that's easy to explain, and I'll no longer refrain," replied Dink, who would have indulged in rhymes no matter how grave the situation might be.

"For goodness sakes, then, tell us!" cried Ken.

"This is a timber ship, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Loaded up clean through with planks and logs?"

"Yes."

"Then make your mind easy on one p'int. There's nothing under the skies that can sink a timber ship so long as she don't strike a rock and scatter her cargo. This here vessel will float forever."

"But won't she sink at all?"

"Certainly. She may go down as far as her deck line, but no further. Let the water come in. We'll be water-logged, and that's the worst that can happen."

"Water-logged!" cried both boys.

"That's what. Let's see the ship what'll run us down after that. She'd think she'd struck a rock. Come on. Dan Stillwater is a fool, or has done this to frighten you over to the Pelican, which won't hold together a month. We'll stop right here, just where we are, and if he thinks he's going to worry us he can go drown himself."

CHAPTER VII.

STILLWATER AGAIN AT WORK

The situation of our friends on the timber ship was not so terrible as they had feared, and yet it was bad enough.

By morning the water in the hold had made considerable headway, and would continue to gain until it reached a certain level.

Ken, Bert and Dink set to work as soon as it was light and took out such of the provisions as would be likely to be in-

jured by the salt water, removing them to a place of safety. This occupied some time, and while it was going on, Stillwater sat up forward on the heel of the bowsprit, smoking, and did not once offer to render them any assistance.

"I kin see through him," muttered Dink, as he came on deck during the morning after having been in the hold. "He was going to scare us with some terrible story of a leak and frighten us over on to the Pelican and then cut adrift."

"The Pelican is worse than this," said Bert.

"That's where you're right, a blamed good sight, for she isn't tight and 'd go down in a night; but my head ain't light and you don't catch this wight in any such plight, as sure as my name's Dink Bight."

"There's one thing I'm sorry for, though," said Ken, looking out over the waste of waters.

"What's that?" asked Bert.

"Why, a water-logged vessel is not apt to make any very great speed, and we might float for years before coming up with the Santa Felicia."

"You think that she is still afloat, then?"

"Certainly."

"You did not think so at first."

"She may have drifted out of the sea of grass years and years ago, though I hardly think it likely."

"If not, she has gone to pieces."

"I don't believe that, either. If she were on the open sea she might be swamped or driven by the currents upon some rock, but here that could not happen. There are no currents. Once here, she would remain here."

"Yes, and for how long?"

"Forever!" murmured Ken. "And perhaps that is our fate."

"Then I don't see any use of worrying over old Spanish treasure ships," cried Mabel, who had approached during the conversation. "We can't use the money here, and if we are never going to get away, we don't want it."

"Sensible girl," cried Ken, laughing. "Come, Bert, we must get to work again."

By night they had the greater part of the provisions removed and stored, either in the cabin or just under the hatches, where the water would not be likely to reach them for some time.

That night Ken read over the log of the Pelican more carefully than they had read it at first, so as to determine, if they could, the point at which she had first met the Santa Felicia and where she now was.

The first appeared to be at the lower western edge of the Sargasso, as far as they could judge, having no chart on which to verify the readings in the log.

Concerning their own position they were, of course, in ignorance, as they had no instruments by which to ascertain it, and they could, therefore, only tell, approximately, where they were.

"Would we drift in any particular direction, Ken, or simply here and there at random, according to the winds?" asked Bert.

"There are no currents here, and not much wind," replied Ken. "Our progress must then, of necessity, be both slow and uncertain. The tides must reach this remote region, of course, and they might have some influence upon us."

"There is no help for us; we are lost!" said Bert, musingly. "And unless some vessel comes through, which isn't at all likely, I don't see but what we'll have to stay here till we sink."

"That won't be as long as we live, then," said Dink. "We'll be water-logged afore long and we can't sink. We'll get down to the water line, or maybe to the decks, but that's all."

"We'll have to carry your stove up to the crosstrees, Mabel," said Ken, smiling, "and let you do your cooking in the tops. How would you like that?"

"I'm ready for anything," said the girl, "but I'm not worrying over it till it comes. We've enough to do without giving way to discouraging thoughts."

The next day Ken and Bert rowed over to the Pelican and threw the skeletons into the sea, there being a space clear of the weeds, up by the bows, so at last the poor remains received the burial of sailors.

The two young fellows made another thorough search through the vessel, but could find no more gold, nor anything else of value.

"I say, Bert, there's one thing that is strange," said Ken, as they were returning.

"Well?"

"There are neither charts nor instruments to be found on board."

"Didn't you take them when we were first over there?"

"I? No, indeed. You went down, you will remember, with Dink, while I stayed on deck with Mabel."

"Then Stillwater took them so that we might not be able to study our position. Of course, they must have been there."

"I see. He thought to lure us over to the Pelican and then try and make his way alone out of this waste."

"There's another thing, Ken. We must see that he does not steal the boat, and leave us helpless."

"Why, he would be mad to attempt to traverse the hundreds of miles of this desert in order to reach the open sea beyond."

"He would do it if he thought it would injure us."

"Then we must watch him, and never let him use the boat alone."

"I'm agreeable, old man. I don't suppose he would take it during the day, and the night is the time we must look out for him."

Whenever the boys went over to the wreck they returned with a boat-load of wood for the galley fire, as their own supply was running short, and they did not wish to be left without any.

That night Ken took the first watch, calling Dink at twelve o'clock, and then turning in and soon falling asleep.

He was aroused by his pipe falling to the deck and breaking, and, starting up with a confused sense of having been asleep, he descended to the cabin to look at the clock.

"One o'clock in the morning," he muttered. "I wonder if I was asleep long. I'll get my watch below taken from me if I go to doing things like that."

Then he returned to the deck and began walking up and down as far as the bow and back to the cabin.

He had taken several turns when he thought he heard the sound of oars.

"By Jinks! I'll bet that fellow took the boat while I was asleep, and is going to make off!" he cried. "I never thought o' that."

He hurried to the rail, peered out into the darkness, and at last distinguished a dark object moving through the water in the direction of the ship.

"He's coming back, so I won't say nothing," he mused. "If I was to make a fuss he might go away and leave us, so I guess I'll wait."

The boat approached nearer and nearer, and at last reached the bow, when Stillwater clambered up the side, bringing the warp with him.

"Where've you been?" asked Dink, walking forward and meeting the mate coming aft.

"Oh, just for a little row, that's all," was the careless answer, as Stillwater towed the boat aft and made the rope fast to a pin just abaft of the waist.

"You don't want to take that 'ere boat without leave, after this," growled Dink.

"Oh, well, you were asleep and I didn't want to disturb you," returned Stillwater, walking forward.

Dink sat musing over this, when suddenly he became conscious of a smell of smoke, and then saw a light shoot up in the direction of the Pelican.

He looked again, springing to his feet, and beheld a tongue of flame rush out from the cabin of the old wreck.

"That scoundrel has fired her!" he cried, excitedly, and then darting down the companionway he hurriedly aroused Ken and Bert.

When the two young fellows came on deck, huge jets of flame were darting from the cabin and hold of the Pelican, while dense masses of smoke hovered over the wreck.

Dink hurriedly explained matters, making no excuses, but telling things just as they were.

"That's all right, Dink," cried Ken. "We don't blame you. The worst of it is that the wind is blowing this way, and if our ship takes fire we are lost."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FORTUNATE ESCAPE—THE COMPACT.

Flames were now bursting from the old wreck at every point, and leaping into the air to a great height.

The wind, as Ken had said, was blowing toward them, and as the Pelican was not more than two or three hundred yards away the danger was imminent.

"There goes our woodpile," said Dink, and, serious as the occasion was, Ken could not repress a smile.

"I suppose that is why the scoundrel fired the wreck," he murmured, "but I am afraid that we may meet with a more serious loss than that. Get out the buckets!"

Deck buckets were brought out and the sea water hauled up and thrown over the decks and against the side nearest the wreck.

"Wet everything down," cried Ken, "and keep the cabin doors closed, or we'll be afire yet!"

In fact, there was great danger of this, for the sparks were flying toward them, and fell on the deck, on the stumps of masts, on the galley and topgallant forecastle, the dry wood being very inflammable.

Stillwater made no effort to assist the young fellows, but sat in the forecastle, gloomily, looking out upon the night.

It was not long before the Pelican was one mass of fire, the flames having eaten their way through the sides as well as the deck.

There she lay, a great, glowing mass, while sparks rained down upon them and made their situation more perilous every instant.

Suddenly, and by the greatest providence, the wind shifted and a few drops of rain began to fall.

"It hasn't rained before in weeks," murmured Bert.

"It has come when we needed it most," replied Ken.

The wreck still burned, furiously, but the sparks were now carried off in another direction, and the castaways were safe, for the time, at least.

The rain came down in a gentle shower, but while it did not quench the fire it cooled the air, which had become intensely hot and stifling on account of the near presence of the burning wreck.

"We owe no thanks to that miserable wretch up forward that we have been saved!" cried Bert, as he watched the old wreck burn. "He wouldn't care if we were destroyed the same as that old hulk."

"Let us be thankful that it is no worse," remarked Ken, thoughtfully. "We have again been spared, and I cannot help thinking that we will at last be rescued."

Piercer and fiercer burned the wreck, till at last, with a mighty crash, her glowing timbers fell apart and were scattered far and wide upon the sea.

Here and there a burning spar or beam floated upon the weed, lighting up the weird scene, although the greater part had been extinguished by falling into the water direct.

When morning dawned no trace of the Pelican was to be seen, except a few blackened timbers floating here and there upon the waves, or lying half covered upon the weed.

Ken met Stillwater at the bows when he came on deck and said:

"You failed in your wicked scheme last night. Of what avail would it have been to you if the ship had taken fire? You would have perished like the rest."

"I would at least have had my revenge!" hissed Stillwater.

"Let us detect you in any more such attempts," cried Ken, with flashing eyes, "and you will be deprived of your liberty, placed in irons and prevented from doing any more mischief."

"You daren't lay a hand on me, any of you, or all of you, either, for that matter," returned Stillwater. "Touch me if you dare!" and he put his hand on his breast.

Ken had his own sheath knife in a belt at his side, where he always carried it, and, although he wished to avoid a quarrel, he had no fear as to the result.

"I am merely giving you a warning," he said, quietly, remaining where he was. "You proposed once that we should be friends, but you have not kept your part of the bargain."

"In what have I failed?" asked Stillwater, glancing toward the cabin.

"In the first place, you scuttled the ship so as to frighten us off."

"Well, and what then?"

"Then you removed the instruments from the old wreck that we might not be able to take an observation, and so ascertain our position."

"There were no instruments on the wreck," muttered Stillwater, glancing again toward the cabin.

"You set fire to the Pelican in order to endanger us and drive us to the scanty shelter of the boat," continued Ken. "Fool, couldn't you see that you ran the same risk that we did?"

The man glanced again in the direction of the cabin, and Ken could not but notice it.

He turned his head to see what it was that had attracted Stillwater's attention, and in an instant the villain was upon him.

Hurling Ken to the deck he sprang upon him, seized him by the throat, drew a knife from the breast of his shirt and raised his hand to strike.

He had been tempted to spring upon Ken several times before this, and had watched the cabin door to see if any one came out.

Ken could not move or cry out, and in another instant the keen blade would have been buried in his side.

The knife descended with lightning speed, cut through the boy's shirt and suddenly glanced aside.

Ken thought at once of a little gold locket which he carried with him always, being a gift from Mabel.

It was this that had saved his life.

"This time you will not escape!" hissed Stillwater, as he again poised the knife for a blow.

Upon the instant a sharp report rang out, and the knife fell to the deck, dashed out of the villain's hand by a bullet.

Then Bert dashed forward, and in an instant was at Ken's side.

Stillwater released his intended victim, and sprang to his feet as Dink came running out of the cabin.

"Seize the scoundrel and put him in irons!" cried Dink. "He has done a mischief."

Stillwater leaped nimbly back, seized a hand-spike from the rail, and cried, defiantly:

"Come on, all of you, and take me if you can. Were there twice as many I would defy you all!"

"Put down that weapon," said Bert, advancing, a smoking pistol in his hand. "I have still another charge here and you shall have it if you don't obey."

The man lowered his weapon and glared angrily at the brave young fellow before him.

"You shall never put me in irons!" he murmured, in low, firm tones.

"We will, if you cannot act like a man. You have behaved like a brute from the first."

"You have no right to put me in irons," returned Stillwater, in sullen tones, as he retreated a few steps.

"We have the right to protect our own lives, and if it becomes necessary to put you in irons to secure that end we will do it. Now, are you going to behave yourself or not?" and Bert advanced, levelling his weapon at the mate.

Uttering a growl, more like that of a wild animal than of a human being, Stillwater hurled the bar at the young fellow's head and dashed toward the fore hatch.

Bert dodged the missile and fired, the bullet passing through Stillwater's hat.

"The scoundrel would have killed you," he said to Ken, "and I do not see why I need spare him."

Stillwater leaped down the half-open hatchway, and when the others came up he had disappeared.

"We ought to fasten him down there like a rat in a trap," said Dink, vigorously. "It's lucky you had that pistol, my young friend."

"It is one of the captain's. I determined to have it with me all the time, a day or so since. I'd advise you all to do the same."

"Good advice," returned Ken, "especially so as we now know what we may expect from this ruffian. You saved my life, Bert, and I thank you. Let us hope that we may all be spared to escape from this horrible place."

"I say, Amen, to that," said Bert, taking Ken's hand; "and whatever our perils may be, let us always stick by one another."

"We will!" said Ken and Dink, and then they went aft, leaving Stillwater at liberty to come on deck if he chose.

CHAPTER IX.

EVENTS OF MATTERS SERIOUS AND OTHERWISE, ON THE SURVIVOR.

Do you know what it was that saved my life this morning, Bert?" asked Ken, as he and Mabel stood on deck in the moonlight that evening.

"Why, of course," answered Mabel, brushing. "It was the shot from Bert's pistol that dashed the knife from that scoundrel's hand."

"Ah, but there was something else—there was this;" and Ken showed her the little gold locket, with a dent in one side.

"It was your love that saved my life," added Ken, "for if you had not given me that I would not have had the locket. I shall keep it as long as I live."

"May my love always be a shield to protect and keep you," said Mabel, and Ken pressed her to his heart as he echoed the wish.

Stillwater had remained below decks all day, and the castaways had seen nothing of him.

The cabin was separated from the hold by a stout bulkhead, but in order that Stillwater might not do them any more mischief, Ken and the others had descended by the main hatch and had counted the door to the hold.

"It would be like him to bore through the bulkhead and let the water into the cabin," said Bert, "and we must prevent it."

The water had already made considerable headway, and the good ship Sunshine's sailing days were now over, for she had settled nearly to her water line, and would sink lower as the timber in her hold became thoroughly saturated.

Day after day passed, with no hostile demonstration from Stillwater, who was seen, now and then at night, prowling around, up forward.

It was fully ten days after his attack upon Ken that he appeared during daylight, and then, as he remained forward and paid no attention to those aft, it was resolved to let him alone.

It was an armed neutrality, however, for they all knew that the fellow could not be trusted, and they were every one of them constantly upon their guard.

Mabel carried a loaded pistol in her belt at all times, and knew how to use it, though she feared less for herself than that she desired to assist the others in case of need.

The water had now risen nearly to the deck line, and it was probably on this account that the former mate had come out of the hold and taken up his old quarters in the fore-castle, for he would not now be allowed to enter the cabin on any pretext.

One day, nearly a week after this, he started to go aft, carrying something in his hand, when Ken met him amidships.

"Where are you going?" Ken asked.

"On the quarter deck to get the sun;" and the man showed Ken a quadrant.

"You can take it forward as well as aft," said Ken, making no reference to the instrument, which he knew was one taken from the Pelican.

The Sunshine's instruments had all been removed to the boats, and Stillwater could not have had one of these, and, besides, this one was of older make, though the man had polished it up to make it appear new.

"If I can't go aft, I won't tell you our position when I determine it," reported the man, gruffly.

"It can make no difference to us where we are," returned Ken, quietly. "We cannot get away. Of what use is the knowledge to us?"

"I can tell you just where we are," persisted the man.

"Dink!" called Ken.

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the seaman appeared instantly.

"Have you any white paint, or any kind in the stores?"

"I've got a lump of chalk."

"Bring it here."

Dink hurried into the cabin and presently came back with a piece of chalk as big as his first, used in scouring the brass work.

"Draw a line across deck, exactly amidships."

Dink did so, and Ken turned to Stillwater and said:

"Your place is forward of that line. Come aft and you go in irons. Since you cannot be trusted you must be kept within bounds."

Bert and Mabel had joined the little group, and upon all the faces there the mate read only the strongest determination.

Uttering a growl, he went forward, and there, when the sun came out full and strong, proceeded to take his observation.

The dividing line on the deck remained where Ken had ordered it put, and Stillwater did not again attempt to cross it, remaining, when on deck, as far forward as the bowsprit, for the most part sitting there smoking and gazing sullenly across the dreary sea of grass.

And so the days passed, with little to break the monotony, one day being like all the rest.

There were a few books in the cabin of the Sunshine, and

these were read and read till their contents were learned by heart.

Now and then Dink or the others would get out their fishing lines and try to coax some of the denizens of the deep from their hiding places; the attempts being sometimes successful, but oftener the reverse.

The ship now lay to her deck line in the water, and the scuppers had to be plugged up to keep the decks dry.

There was little chance that they would sink any lower for a considerable time, so no very great alarm was manifested.

One morning, when Dink came on deck, he noticed a dark object upon the water a few hundred feet from the ship, and called Ken's attention to it.

"What d'ye s'pose that is, Master Kenneth?" he asked.

"Looks like the top of a ship's house, or a capsized boat, Dink."

"A boat's boat, and if it'll float it's worthy of note, so let's take a vote and go after that boat."

"It ought to be worth something to us, Dink, if no more than firewood."

"That's what I think; and sure's my name's Dink, I'll have it, float or sink, as quick as a wink;" and the eccentric fellow began to get the skiff ready so as to go after the mysterious object.

In a few minutes he was sculling through a little lane of clear water toward the dark object, while Ken, Bert and Mabel stood watching him from the deck.

They saw him run his boat up to and almost upon the dark object, which appeared to be about twenty feet in length and five or six feet wide, being black and curved like an overturned boat.

He thrust out an oar and struck the thing a blow as though to determine its character, being evidently puzzled at the result.

"Blow me if I know what it is," he called out, as he struck it with his oar. "It don't look like wood, and it can't be iron."

Then he took one end of the boat's warp in his hand and jumped out upon the floating object, which easily supported his weight.

He hauled the skiff up on it and then struck the butt end of his oar down sharply.

"Guess it's an island," he was saying, when there came a sudden and most startling interruption.

The island began to heave up and down, a stream of vapor suddenly shot up from one end of it, while the other began lashing the waves into foam.

Then it suddenly shot through the water, puffing and churning the waves like a steamboat.

Dink tumbled into the boat, oar and all, and in another instant he was tossing on the waves at the imminent danger of being capsized.

"There she blows!" cried Ken, from the deck. "Where's your harpoon, Dink?"

Then the strange object lifted two enormous flukes out of the water, and suddenly disappeared from sight, leaving the waters seething and white with foam, the little skiff tossing like a feather upon the dancing waves.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" cried Dink, clinging to a thwart. "If I didn't land on a whale's back and never knew it! Great ginger! how he did go it."

The huge creature came up again, two miles away, in a few minutes, its spout or blow denoting its location.

"A whale!" cried Ken, as Bert spoke. "How did it get here, do you suppose?"

"It is a lone one, I presume," replied Bert, "and is making its way to the regular feeding grounds. It must have been lying asleep when Dink landed on its back."

"A whale, and I never knew it," said Dink, as he sculled toward the ship and came on board. "Tell you what, if I hadn't tumbled into the boat he'd have gone off with me on his back, and I'd never come home again. Come the nearest to getting scared I ever did."

"You were pretty well frightened, I fancy, for you haven't made a rhyme since you came aboard," said Bert, with a laugh.

"Well, now, maybe I was, but, anyhow, we've got suthin' to think on, and that's new, at any rate. Wouldn't mind a whale coming along every day; we might hitch on to one and let him tow us out o' here."

"Not a bad idea," said Ken, with a smile, "though it's hardly practical enough for us."

CHAPTER X.

HOW KEN SENT A MESSAGE HOME

The adventure of Dink and the whale caused considerable amusement on board the water-logged ship, and also gave Ken an idea.

"If one whale comes through this sea of grass on his way to the grounds," he said to Bert, "why may not others do the same?"

"It is likely enough, I suppose."

"Then why would it not be wise to prepare for the advent of the next one and make him useful to us?"

"In what way? We can't hope to catch and cut up one of these big fellows."

"No, of course not. He would be of no use to us dead."

"Well?" said Bert, expectantly.

"We must send a message home by one of these creatures. It may be years before we float out of this place, but if our position is known we stand a chance of being rescued."

"How are you going to send a message by a whale?" asked Bert, while Dink looked on in surprise.

"It's a wonderful tale, this one of the whale, and it makes me turn pale and put on a veil," he observed, as he lighted his pipe.

"This is my idea," said Ken, and the others gave him their closest attention.

"We have preserved meat cans, and we have paper and pens. We can write out the story of our adventures and our probable position at this time, and inclose the document in a can, taking care to make it air-tight."

"Well, and how will you send it?"

"I will fasten it to a harpoon, and when the next whale comes this way, go out in the boat and drive the weapon into him."

"Some time a whaler will come across him, discover the harpoon and the message, and so learn about us."

"An excellent scheme, and I had a dream, the other night, that it'll come out all right," remarked Dink.

"Your plan is ingenious enough," said Bert, "but where shall we get our harpoon?"

"Make it."

Bert looked puzzled, and Ken proceeded to explain.

"We have a small iron bar in the cabin, we have a fire and there are files in the tool-chest. We ought to be able to fashion a rough sort of harpoon with these."

"And then suppose our whale does not make his appearance?"

"I am taking the chances that he will," was the quiet answer.

"Then there is another objection."

"Well? I want to hear them all so as to know what to be prepared for."

"We do not know what our position is."

"We will ask Stillwater. This concerns him as well as us."

"He will not tell us."

"Not when it may lead to his rescue as well as ours?" asked Mabel, who now spoke for the first time during the consultation.

"No, not even for that reason," answered Bert. "A more contemptible dog-in-the-manger sort of a man does not exist."

"You may be right," said Ken, musingly, "but I think I will try him, for all that."

Having once considered the idea a good one the little party of castaways lost no time in carrying it out.

Dink undertook to make the harpoon, for he was an universal genius, and had tried his hand at a good many trades before finally going to sea.

The small end of the bar was heated, bent over to the length of six inches and the new end flattened upon a rude anvil while it was hot.

The bar was again heated as hot as the galley stove could make it, when the blunt end was lengthened and made more pointed, the former end being sharpened so as to form the barb of the harpoon, the whole then being tempered till it was as tough as steel.

Then, by the aid of files, the point and barb were sharpened till at last a very presentable harpoon was turned out by the young smiths.

"We must make it as heavy as we can," suggested Bert, "so that it will be sure to sink deep into the creature's flesh and remain there."

"Fill the can with shot," suggested Dink. "We have a lot, and can spare 'em as well as not, put 'em in hot, and then they won't rot."

"A good idea," said Bert; "and it suggests another. We will want hot lead to seal up our can. We'll melt the shot and make a solid bottom to our can."

A good, bright can was found, and half-filled with hot lead, which gave it just the weight needed.

The message was then written, folded up neatly and placed in the can, which was then to be hermetically sealed and bound to the shaft of the harpoon with fine, strong wire.

"The message is ready—now for the messenger," said Ken.

This work had occupied the party two or three days, during which time Stillwater had occasionally ventured as far as the chalk line on the deck, and from that point had watched what was going on.

"Stillwater," said Ken, when all was ready, going to the fore-castle.

"Well," growled the fellow, "why can't you keep to your own end of the ship?"

"Come out," said Ken. "I want to speak to you."

"I can listen here as well as any other place," was the surly answer.

"I want to know the position of the ship. We are making up a document which we hope may one day reach America and lead to our rescue."

Stillwater came out and followed Ken as far as the chalk line.

"What is your plan?" he asked, with a growl.

Ken explained, briefly, and showed the man the harpoon and the written document.

"That will never reach home," he muttered, as he walked away. "If you want to know our position, figure it out yourselves as I have done. I know where we are, but then I am of no account."

"Won't you tell us the reckoning, Mr. Stillwater?" asked Mabel, taking a few steps forward.

The man turned, gazed savagely at the girl, and then, with

an angry scowl, entered his quarters, secured the door and window and remained secluded the rest of the day.

"It is no use," said Ken. "We will leave the exact location out and seal the can up at once. We don't know how soon we may have to dispatch it."

That one whale seemed to be the only one they were to see, however, for days and weeks passed and no leviathans came into this far-away part of the ocean.

"I have heard that the neighborhood of the Azores Islands is a good place for whales," said Bert, one day, "and as we are between them and the American coast, where whales are also found, why aren't we in the direct track of these fellows when they change their grounds?"

"Everything avoids this sea of death," murmured Ken, gloomily. "Man and beast alike shun it. We might as well throw the harpoon overboard. It has been already for months and may be so for years."

"Don't give it up yet, Ken," said Mabel, overhearing these discouraging remarks. "We can afford to wait."

"It's all we can do," returned Ken, as he went into the cabin.

The harpoon was put in the galley, and no more was said about it; another month passing away without any opportunity to use it offering.

One day, however, Dink was sitting on the quarter deck, mending an old pair of trousers, which sadly needed repairing, when he chanced to gaze out across an open space in the grass, which lay all around them.

"There she blows!" he yelled. "The time has come at last!"

Down went the old trousers, and Dink leaped to the deck at a bound and dashed into the galley.

The sound aroused Ken and Bert, who were in the cabin, and they came rushing up in an instant.

There, less than half a mile away, could be seen the spout of a huge sperm whale.

"Lower the boat!" cried Bert, rushing to the davits and loosening the ropes.

It had but a short distance to descend, but Dink was in it before it touched grass.

Bert followed, and he and Dink cleared a space for themselves and pushed off.

"I must remain with Mabel," said Ken. "Go, and may good luck go with you!"

He then hurried below, procured the captain's spyglass, and went upon the quarterdeck, where he watched the boat, Mabel standing by his side.

Stillwater came out, stood on the heel of the bowsprit and followed the boat, with hungry eyes, as it made its way through the open lane of water.

Ken's eyes were glued to the glass, and he did not remove them for even a moment.

His heart beat fast, and he uttered a fervent prayer for the success of the venture upon which he had once counted so dearly.

The boat seemed scarcely to move; and there lay the whale as if waiting for its approach.

Nearer and nearer came the two adventurers, and presently Dink arose and stood in the bow while Bert pulled.

"They are coming up behind him," whispered Ken, the glass at his eyes. "He will not see them. Good! H'm! Bert is pulling slow and steady so as to make no noise. The great animal lies motionless on the water. Ha! they have reached him! They are rowing alongside! Now!"

He heaved a deep sigh, and in a moment went on with the description of what he saw.

"They are midway of his body. Dink poises the harpoon, Bert rests upon his oars. Ha! he has thrown the harpoon! It sinks deep into the creature's side. Back water, boys, for your lives! My God! they will be swamped! No, no, they

are safe! The whale rushes through the water and dives deep down beneath the grass. They are pulling with all their strength. Thank God! they have succeeded!"

Then, overcome by his excitement, Ken let the glass fall from his grasp and sank unconscious to the deck.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RED GULL AND ITS ERRAND

"The messenger is on his way home with our story," were the first words that Ken heard as he came back to consciousness.

Bert and Dink were bending over him, and Mabel was pressing a wet cloth to his throbbing temples.

"You ought to have seen how he jumped!" cried Dink, as Ken sat up. "We just missed getting hit by that big tail of his. Sad tale for us if we had got a whack with it."

"The harpoon stayed?"

"Yes, sir. It went in clean up to the end." I put in all the muscle I had. Didn't we pull? Yes, sir, just like a bull, and our heads just full, of getting away and trying it again some other day."

"It was a narrow escape for us," added Bert. "Dink told me where to row him and when he threw the harpoon I backed water with all my might. He jumped aft, grabbed an extra oar and slung us around just in time to avoid getting hit with the brute's big flukes."

"If Bert hadn't pulled then for all he could, we couldn't have got away," spoke up Dink. "The big fellow dove the minute he reached the grass and never came up again for a good five miles."

"I am glad you escaped," said Ken; "and let us trust that your efforts have not been made in vain."

"He was heading for the east," said Dink, "the great, big beast, and I hope he'll meet the whole of the fleet, and be cut up into mincemeat, and then our letter will make all hands feel better."

"That's bad measure, Dink," said Ken, with a smile.

"No, it's good measure; it's more than enough," returned the poet.

"Will that message ever reach home?" muttered Stillwater, as he sat on the knighthead forward, smoking his black pipe. "I was a fool not to give them the reckoning. Well, well, no one can tell; and if I am never heard neither will they be. They will die of despair, but I will live—live for revenge, and one day the skipper's daughter will be mine. I can wait, for my time is sure to come."

After the excitement consequent upon sending the message by the whale had subsided, matters resumed their usual monotonous course on board the Sunshine.

Stillwater gave his companions no more trouble, though he appeared to be brooding over some fancied wrong, and would be seen sitting up forward, with a dark scowl upon his face, for hours at a time.

"He is plotting mischief," said Bert to Ken one day, a month after the whale incident, "and it will be just as well to keep an eye upon him."

"What can he do?"

"Many things; and I know that he is thinking of injuring us in some way. I have seen that evil look on his face before and know what it means."

"It is a pity that he did not go away in the boat as he intended."

"If he had done so, Mabel would have gone with him."

"What do you mean?" cried Ken, his face flushing deeply.

"I mean that Stillwater's scheme was to wreck the vessel,

abandon the captain and carry off his child; and even yet he does not give up the thought of one day possessing her."

"The villain!" gasped Ken. "That pure girl was never meant for him, and he shall never possess her. She would rather die than meet such a fate."

"We must prevent it, and that is why I say that the scoundrel must be watched."

"He shall be," muttered Ken, in firm, determined tones.

"I have long suspected the villain's motive," continued Bert, "until at last, by close observation, I have assured myself that I have hit upon the correct one."

"Many things seem to point to it, now that we look back," returned Ken, in a musing tone. "Now, more than ever, must he be watched."

"They will soon lose heart and relax their vigilance," thought Stillwater, as he sat in the bows, smoking, "and then will be my opportunity. I must somehow obtain a pistol, so that I can be on more equal terms. It will be an easy matter then to kill them off and possess the girl for my own. I can wait, as I have waited, knowing that in the end I will succeed."

That day a gull suddenly appeared, struck against the stump of the foremast and fell to the deck, stunned.

Dink, who saw the occurrence, rushed up, caught the bird and clapped him under a hencoop, which had long been in disuse.

"Hallo! Ken, Bert, Miss Mabel!" he called out. "Here's the luckiest find yet."

The castaways came running forward, and Dink, pointing to the captive, said:

"Here's a gull; he might have broke his skull, but he fell on deck without hurting his neck. I put him in the coop and now—and now——"

"You thought you might use him as a carrier pigeon?" cried Ken.

"That's it. He's only stunned, and after a bit he'll be all chipper. That fellow can fly a thousand miles without rest."

"We haven't seen a gull as big as this since we've been here," observed Bert. "The chances are that he will make for more-traveled zones as soon as he is liberated."

"And when he does go, he shall carry a message for us," added Ken.

"You will not say now that heaven has abandoned us?" asked Mabel, earnestly.

"No; and I have never felt so, no matter what bitter words I may have spoken."

The gull was found to be uninjured, and greatly desirous of regaining his freedom, as he beat against the bars of the coop with his strong wings, and uttered harsh and discordant cries.

Had he been given more room he might have seriously injured himself in his efforts to escape, and, as it was, the castaways thought best to secure his wings and prevent him from moving.

It was not an easy task, as the bird was a powerful one; but there were three to do it, and they finally succeeded.

Ken wrote out an account of the shipwreck, much shorter than the last, incasing it in oiled silk, and intending to fasten it to the gull's leg before freeing him.

"A white gull like this one will attract no attention," said Mabel, as they were discussing the matter, "and he might carry our secret with him for years and no one be the wiser."

"True," returned Ken; "but we must take our chances."

"If the bird was red or red and white, or strangely marked in any way, he would attract attention; and those who saw him would want to secure him."

Ken looked at Mabel, and an inkling of her thoughts came into his mind.

"Suppose we dye one of his wings and his breast a deep red and leave the rest white?" said the girl.

"Good!" cried all the rest.

"There is logwood in the hold, and we can make our dye, easily enough."

"An excellent idea!" said Ken.

"Of course no one would notice one white gull more than another," added Bert, "while a bright red one will be a decided novelty."

"And none of us ever thought of it but Mabel," said Ken. "We haven't as much sense, all of us, as she has."

It was an easy matter to get some logwood out of the hold and make a dye which would answer every purpose, but how to apply it was more puzzling.

This matter was soon settled, however.

The gull, being powerless to move his wings, was taken from his cage and plunged into the iron pot containing the dye, the operation being repeated until he came out a deep red.

"When his wings are free he will show white beneath, and cannot help attracting attention," said Ken. "Now let him get dry, so that we can see how the dye sets."

The next day the letter Ken had written was tied to the bird's leg, and then, while Ken held him up, Bert cut the bands about his wings.

"Good-by!" cried Ken, as he tossed the late captive out over the water.

In another instant a huge bird, with a bright-red body, red wings above and white beneath, swept up into the clouds, paused an instant to utter a harsh cry, and then directed its flight straight to the eastward.

"Did ever any one see a red gull?" cried Bert. "Naturalists will go wild over this new discovery."

"Until they learn what woman's wit and ingenuity can accomplish," added Ken; "and then they will give all their admiration to the fair sex."

"I think that is where the most of it goes now," said Mabel, with a sly look and a blush; and the rest agreed with her.

CHAPTER XII.

LOST IN THE FOG.

Two years have passed since the Sunshine first entered the sea of fog, and in that time many changes have taken place.

The water-logged ship still floats, but, as far as its tenants can tell, does not materially change its position, having been in apparently the same spot for a year past.

Stillwater had taken no observation for many weeks, when one day he brought out his ancient quadrant and went to work as formerly.

After getting his altitude and making a few figures in an old memorandum book, he sprang up, in a rage, threw the quadrant into the sea and exclaimed, bitterly:

"Always the same place! Will we never get out of this accursed region?"

"You might at least tell us where we are," said Bert, who witnessed this outburst.

"I might?" sneered Stillwater. "Look!"

With that he seized his chart, which had been placed on the roof of the house on deck, tore it into a hundred fragments and threw them into the water.

"You shouldn't possess the knowledge I do if you begged for it," he hissed. "You are doomed to die in this place, and I will yet laugh at you all."

Then he hurried into his room, and did not appear again, except at night, for nearly a week.

Time passed, and the vessel sank lower and lower, the water being above her deck line on the outside, though

little or none came through, owing to the precaution of having had the scuppers plugged up.

The ship would probably never sink so low that she would have to be abandoned; at least, it would be so long that there was no need in worrying over such an event.

Storms were of infrequent occurrence, although heavy fogs would often settle over the ocean of grass and blot everything from sight.

Now and then a flock of birds would pass over the ship, and at rare intervals sharks or porpoises would be seen, but this was not often, the place seeming nearly abandoned by living things.

"Ken, old fellow," said Bert, a few weeks after Stillwater's latest outburst, "we ought to go about more."

"Where can we go to?"

"Take the boat and row along these patches of open water. We are dying for want of exercise."

"Leave the ship in charge of that scoundrel? He might set it on fire before we returned."

"Well, let him, then, if he's fool enough," said Bert, impatiently. "We ought not to deny ourselves everything on his account."

"I suppose we might leave Dink aboard. He is a match for the wretch."

"Yes, and another time I will stay."

"Very well; let's go on a voyage of discovery at once."

The next day, therefore, Ken, Bert and Mabel went out in the boat, leaving Dink to get dinner.

"You'd better take some grub with you," said Dink, "for if adventures you should meet, you'll be sure to want something to eat, so here's a treat in a can of meat, likewise something sweet, and thus I greet—"

"That'll do, Dink!" cried Bert, with a laugh. "We'll take some provisions, as well as pipes and tobacco, for we might want 'em."

"Put in some water; I know you orter; it's good to drink, come to think, so I'll give you the wink, and don't forget Dink."

"All right; we'll want that if we don't take anything else. Run up a flag on the old hulk so that we may locate it."

Bert rowed, while Ken steered, Mabel sitting in the bows and pushing aside the weed when it drifted against them, as it frequently would.

The ship was seen without any trouble, as it was the largest of the many objects that were floating about.

"Here is the top of a ship's house," said Mabel, after they had been rowing an hour or more, "and yonder is a topmast with cross-trees sticking up out of the water. I don't remember to have seen these before."

"Strange things come into this dead sea of ours," said Ken, "but nothing ever seems to leave it. We never will, at any rate. I don't believe we have moved a hundred yards in six months."

"All the more reason why we should go around and see things," added Bert.

There was plenty to see in this strange region, and the trip in the boat was very enjoyable.

The varied colors of the mud, ranging from pink to purple, and from yellow to a deep green, made the floating vegetation look like a veritable garden, while the patches of water were like paths through the aquatic parterres.

Now and then a fish would leap out of the water as the oars disturbed its quiet, and, again, a flock of birds, far away in the heavens, suggested thoughts of the world they had left, and which seemed as difficult to reach as the birds themselves.

The expedition was prolonged beyond the limits originally set upon it, and it was noon before the excursionists were aware of it.

"I would not have supposed that there was so much to see," said Mabel. "What is that over there, a ship?"

Ken, who was now rowing, turned his head, looked at the object Mabel pointed out, and turned suddenly pale.

"We had better return at once," he said, quietly. "Put us about, Bert."

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Mabel, seeing the look of alarm in Bert's face.

"Your ship is a fog bank, and the wind is blowing it toward us. It would not be pleasant to be caught out here in a fog."

"Fog!" cried Mabel. "Why, the fog sometimes lasts a week."

"Yes," answered Ken, who was now pulling steadily, and making good progress.

So was the enemy behind them, and it was not long before his presence was felt.

At first, fleeting masses of vapor floated about them, soon melting away, but giving place to others more dense.

Then the way was not so clear before them, and their progress was slower, the fog clinging to them with clammy touch.

At last it settled down all about them, dull, leaden and oppressive, and it was impossible to see a yard beyond the bows.

A cold, choking fog that chilled one to the bone, a reeking, chilling atmosphere that seemed to paralyze the heart, a dull, clammy air that was like the heat of a vault and as deadly.

It closed in around them, and with it came the night and sea; sky and wind were blotted out.

They were lost in the fog!

CHAPTER XIII.

SEEN THROUGH THE MISTS.

Lost in the fog!

The position of the little party in the boat was one fraught with the utmost peril.

It is true that they had not storms or tempests to fear, but, nevertheless, their situation was a dangerous one.

The fog might last for days, and in a little boat with food and water sufficient to last but a few hours, they might perish within half a mile of the ship and not know but that it was miles and miles away.

The fog hung so thickly about them that it was impossible to see beyond the boat, and, to add to their troubles, night had now fallen.

It was not only a dense and clammy fog, but a cold one as well, and one which seemed to bear all the noxious vapors in its train, so that to breathe it was like inhaling the breath of the pestilence.

"I can't have you breathing and being exposed to this poisonous air," said Ken, taking his coat and putting it over Mabel's shoulders. "I would as soon have you breathe the air of a pest house."

"I can't understand why the air should have such a vicious odor since the fog has fallen" mused Bert. "It is as though we were passing through a swamp."

"Oh, the place and everything in it is dead!" cried Ken impatiently. "These thousands and thousands of acres of weed growing and dying all the time must produce baleful vapors which the fogs only intensify because the sunshine and the wind cannot carry them off."

"The fog cannot last forever," said Mabel.

"A week will be long enough for us without looking for an eternity," answered Ken dolefully. "You and I must eat nothing, Bert, for Mabel may be saved if we are not. I might have known we were already doomed when we came into this abandoned region, and yet I thought that we might not only escape but that we might bear away with us the gold of the old treasure ship."

"That may or may not be likely," said Mabel, "but I do not think that we ought to give up our hold upon life till the last."

"I ought not, I suppose," said Ken sadly, "when I think of all I have to make it pleasant, or would have, if I could ever get away from this horrible sea of grass."

"Well, talking of it can't make it any better," muttered Bert; "and as I have a sailor's consolation with me I propose to fly to its protection."

What he meant was his pipe which he carried in a side pocket of his reefer, along with a half plug of tobacco and some matches.

Filling and lighting his pipe, Bert puffed away in silence for some moments, the fragrant smoke hanging just above his head in a cloud while the fire in the pipe bowl glowed like the eye of some monster from amid the darkness, now and again lighting up the smoke cloud as Bert puffed more vigorously than common.

"Better follow my example, Ken," he said at length. "It's a great comfort to be able to smoke."

"You are fortunate if you can obtain any comfort in this awful place," returned Ken gloomily. "I can't."

"Come, come, old fellow, don't give way so," said Bert cheerfully. "Cheer up. Speak to him, Miss Mabel, and make him give up these gloomy notions. Take a pipe, my boy, and you will feel better at once."

Ken made no reply, and Bert took up the oars and began slowly rowing, though he could see nothing ahead of him.

They were in one of the open spaces, however, and if they could not see they could feel, and in that way tell when they ran into the weed.

Bert smoked and rowed at the same time, and now and then sang softly to himself, always choosing a cheerful song, however, and never taking a tune which, from its mournfulness, would be likely to increase Ken's despondency.

At last, when his pipe was smoked out, he knocked the ashes into the water, put down his oars and said:

"Well, I suppose we might take a rest. It is too dark to see anything, and there is no use in rowing too far until we know where we are going."

"I will row if you like," said Ken quietly. "I think it is quite likely that we have been going right."

This was a change from his former despondency, and Bert passed over the oars with a smile, though he said nothing.

The lane of open water still continued, although there was no way of knowing if it were straight or not, as the darkness was so intense.

At last Ken rested on his oars, listened attentively, and said:

"Do you hear nothing, Bert?"

"Yes," replied Bert, after a pause. "I hear a ripple."

"We are near the ship, then, and that is the water washing against the rail."

"It may be," said Bert, musingly, and listening again, "and yet it does not sound like it."

"If it is, Dink will be on the lookout," said Mabel. "Call to him."

"Hello, Dink!" cried Ken. "Are you there?"

There was no reply, and then Bert hailed the darkness.

Still no answer came, and a pause followed, broken by Mabel, who suddenly exclaimed:

"Look! Look! the stars are beginning to shine out above us—the fog is breaking."

"Yes, overhead," said Bert, "but it is thick enough down here yet."

Here and there a star could be seen, and little by little the fog thinned overhead, though on the water it was still heavy and oppressive.

"Hark!" said Ken suddenly. "Can't you hear the ripple again?"

"Yes," said Bert; "but it sounds like waves breaking under a vessel's quarter, not all a rail like ours."

"You don't mean that there may be another ship in this wilderness?" cried Ken excitedly.

"Why not? Didn't we find the Pelican?"

"To be sure we did," interposed Mabel. "Listen again."

This time the sound was quite distinct, and was like that made by the waves dashing up under a vessel's quarter, the creaking of the rudder chains being heard also.

"There is another ship here!" cried Ken, springing up. "Ship ahoy, ahoy! Are you all dead yonder?"

The words were echoed from some broad surface, and came back to them almost distinctly as they were uttered.

"It is not our water-logged vessel," said Bert, quickly. "That does not set high enough from the water to give back an echo."

"See, the fog is lifting!" cried Mabel. "Do you not feel the wind in your faces?"

There was quite a strong current of air felt at this moment, and presently the upper strata of the fog was lifted, and the moon could be seen shining with dazzling brilliancy.

After some time the fog on the surface floated from them, leaving the water clear for a considerable space.

There, not fifty feet away, resting calmly on the weed-laden waters, was a large ship of antique build, its high stern with its numerous windows, and the bow built up like that of a modern steamboat, showing it to be a thing of the remote past.

The masts were but stumps, and the tangled and rotting cordage and the rusty shrouds hung over the sides and touched the water.

The rudder was gone, but a chain hanging from the stern just swept the sea, and now and again rattled against the hull, producing the sound which they had taken for the creaking of the rudder chain.

"Look!" cried Ken, as a flood of silver light bathed the ancient vessel, "here is our treasure ship at last. Here is the Santa Felicia!"

"She has come to us, since we could not go to her," added Bert. "Come, let us go aboard. We shall be better housed there than in this little boat."

As he spoke, the fog suddenly closed about them again, and so densely that not only was the old ship lost to sight, but the moon and stars as well, and even objects no further away than the length of the boat.

"It has gone," said Ken sadly. "After all, it was but a vision, and as unreal as all our hopes."

No one made reply, for all were as despondent now as Ken himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

BACK TO THE OLD SHIP.

It was a long and weary night to those in the boat, but it came to an end at last, the morning finding the fog still swallowing up the sea and sky.

The remaining provisions were divided and eaten, after which Bert proposed that they try and find the old ship they had seen in the night.

"I don't believe it exists at all," murmured Ken. "What we saw was but a creation of the imagination."

"Well, then, we can try to find our own vessel," said Bert, seeing that Ken was still in a gloomy mood.

"Yes, we can do that, I suppose," was the answer. "As for the treasure ship, I do not believe that we shall ever see it."

"We saw it last night."

"We thought we did; but you and I have both seen the

mirage at sea, Bert, and I know what strange forms it takes. The ship we saw may have been the reflection of one a hundred miles off."

"I know that the eye plays us strange tricks," said Bert, reflectively, "but we heard the rattling of chains."

"I'll wager you won't find her again, that's all," returned Ken, doggedly.

The fog was still thick, but not so impenetrable as it had been during the night, and our friends were able to see around them and distinguish objects close at hand.

By little and little it grew brighter, and at last, to their unspeakable delight, the sun burst forth in all his glory, and the mists were quickly dissolved and driven away before his arrows of light.

"Where is your ancient treasure ship now?" asked Ken, standing up and looking all about.

"The fog lies still to the north of us," said Bert. "Perhaps she is hidden behind it."

"Hm! You still believe that what you saw was real?" muttered Ken.

"Yes. But just now I am more interested in our own water-logged vessel."

As the sun arose higher in the heavens the air grew clearer, although to the north the fog still lay thick and dense upon the sea, the wind being in that direction.

Ken laid his course toward the place where he supposed the Sunshine to be, having now the sun to guide him, and at the end of two or three hours they beheld Dink's signal flag flying from the stump of the foremast.

An hour later they stood on deck, and were cordially welcomed by Dink, who seemed never to tire of shaking them all by the hand.

"Welcome home, no more to roam over the foam!" he cried joyfully. "The skies are blue, and fair to view, and home again we fear no pain, and give the reign to joy and glee, so sing with me, and be free, and—and—well, I haven't any more rhymes, but I'm as glad to see you as can be, and I hope you won't get lost again."

Stillwater sat up forward smoking his inevitable pipe, but neither seeing nor noticing the return of the wanderers.

"Back again, eh?" he mused, though he gave no sign that he knew of their presence. "I was in hopes that they'd never come aboard again. Well, I can wait, as I have waited."

"How did Stillwater behave while you were alone with him?" asked Bert of Dink in the cabin.

"Oh, well enough. He went in when the fog came on and never showed himself till morning, and there he's sat ever since, with no more expression on his ugly mug than a log, or a dog, or a frog, and I was all in a fog."

"Then he offered you no violence?"

"Hm! like to see him," muttered Dink, with a grin. "No, he never said nothing."

"Do you know that we found the old Spanish treasure ship, Santa Felicia?" asked Bert suddenly.

"No! Did you, though? Did you bring home any of the gold with you?"

"No; we were not on board the ship; we only saw it through the fog for a moment, and then we lost it."

"Why didn't you stay around there till morning?"

"We thought we did, but when morning came nothing was to be seen of the ship."

"Are ye sure 'twas the Santy Felish?"

"It could not be anything else."

"Well, well, well! In sight of that vast treasure house and never even get a copper. My word! I never heard anything so absurd, it's well averred that never a word could ever be heard so very absurd."

"Well, we are safe back upon the old ship again, at all events, and that is something."

After their experience with the fog the castaways did not venture away from the ship to any distance for a long time, although they made frequent excursions within a short radius in search of drift-wood, aquatic plants and fish, or for the sake of exercise.

Mabel was never left on the ship unless some one was with her, for the young men still distrusted the mate, and were determined to give him no opportunity for mischief.

The man lived alone, preparing his own food, sitting by himself, or walking up and down forward; his principal occupation in fine weather, however, consisted in sitting well up forward with a pipe in his mouth, in which position he would sometimes remain for hours together.

Months passed, and they saw nothing of the old treasure ship, till at last they began to think that it was, as Ken had said, a mere optical delusion, and that they had actually seen nothing, but had only imagined it.

They had been three years lost in the sea of grass, and were evidently no nearer the end than at first.

The ship's provisions, consisting largely of preserved goods, would suffice them for many years yet, and there was no lack of fresh water, so that as regarded mere living they had nothing to fear.

The vessel seemed to be stationary, at least she had not sunk any deeper, the water in the hold being now level with the hatches, which were kept closed, as there was no longer any need of going below.

The books in Captain Howard's little library had been read over and over, and our little party was sometimes at a loss for something to do to make the time pass, particularly in bad weather.

Being a universal genius, Dink was as busy as anybody, and many were the new inventions he planned and carried out in order to keep himself employed.

He made playing cards, backgammon and checker boards, sets of chessmen and dice, and carved more canes than he would be able to wear out in a lifetime.

Then he tried his hand at a fiddle, and produced something that would make a noise certainly, though it was an open question whether or not the sounds it gave out could properly be called music.

He also kept a log of the voyage and wrote down everything that occurred on board the ship, no matter how trivial, so that it was already a most voluminous affair in several volumes, with the prospect of greatly increasing its size as time went on.

One day, more than three years after entering the sea of grass, the air grew suddenly very oppressive, so that even breathing became difficult.

The horizon was as black as ink, while just above the sky was the color of copper, the air being heavily charged with electric fluid.

"Something's up!" muttered Bert. "Look there!" pointing to the southeast.

Blacker and blacker grew the sky, and then a terrible roar was heard, and a great wall of foaming breakers could be seen rushing toward them fully five miles away.

Then an awful hissing was heard, the heavens were riven by the forked lightnings, the sky was as black as night, and the tempest was about to sweep upon them.

"It is a cyclone!" cried Ken. "We are lost!"

"Stick to the old hulk while it holds together!" screamed Bert. "It is our only hope."

Then there came a blinding flash, and in an instant a fierce gust of wind struck the vessel, tore out the stumps of masts, swept away everything movable on deck, and shivered the rail to splinters.

Then a huge wave broke upon them, rushed from quarter

to be in a small boat, and they had to find a path.

CHAPTER XV.

IN BAD LUCK AGAIN.

The cyclone, formed in the south Atlantic, had swept across the lower end of the Sargossa, and thence on across the ocean in a general westerly direction, finally ravishing the coast of southern Florida and the West Indies.

It traveled at a frightful velocity, and was forty miles in width, the Sunshine being struck by its outer edge.

Had our friends encountered the worst of it they would never have lived to tell it, and as it was their situation was desperate.

The water-logged ship, safe enough before now, had at last met the only danger to be feared, and had been broken up by the force of the tempest.

As long as it remained intact there was no fear of its sinking, but lacking the life and animation which had once sent it skimming over the waves and through heavy seas, it was now a target for the fury of the storm.

It could not resist, it could not flee, and so it was beaten upon and broken, its timbers riven asunder, and its fragments scattered broadcast upon the waves.

Dink, Ken and Bert stood manfully by each other and by Mabel, resolving to save her at all risks.

They lost sight of Stillwater immediately after the first shock of the tempest, and when at last the cyclone had passed they saw nothing of him.

The storm had passed in less than ten minutes, and all was calm and fair again, but what a change those few minutes had wrought.

The boat was missing, and had probably been demolished, and now all that lay between them and the ocean was a raft of some six or eight logs hastily put together after the storm.

Ken had been hurled into the sea at the first shock, but his companions had quickly joined him, Bert having seized Mabel when he felt the old ship tremble beneath them.

No one was able to tell clearly what had happened, it had all come upon them so quickly, the only thing that they knew positively being that they were now alive.

Fragments of the ship lay here and there, and occasionally a mass of logs held together, but this was only a small portion of the wreck, and it was only by the merest chance that they had escaped annihilation.

"Well," said Dink, as they sat upon their little raft, "the old ship has gone at last, and it's a wonder that we did not go with it."

"We might better have done so," said Ken, bitterly, "since we are doomed as it is. We have no provisions, no water, no shelter, and are fated to die a lingering death."

"While there is life there is hope," said Bert cheerfully, "and I am not ready to give up yet by any means."

"Oh, yes, you were always hopeful," said Ken; "but what is there to look forward to now?"

"There don't seem to be very much, I'll admit," said Bert, with a laugh, "but we'll find it, you may be sure."

That day they caught a few small fishes, and at night it rained, so that they were able to keep from starving, though the outlook seemed gloomy enough.

The next day they found a turtle, and on the following day came across a meat can lying on the mud, where it had evidently been washed.

Dink opened it with his knife, and they had food enough to last for two days with a little care.

The raft was made as strong as possible, a mass of tangled

to bind the logs together.

Dink found a broken oar, and this served as a paddle, for it was necessary that they change their quarters in order that they might find material to add to their raft or, possibly, another old vessel.

"I am sure that we will find the Santa Felicia again," said Bert, four or five days after the wreck.

"She was destroyed by the cyclone," answered Ken.

"Perhaps not. She was too far away for us to see, and, it is very likely, was out of the line of the storm."

"Hardly likely," muttered Ken, who was growing despondent again.

At last, at the end of a week, when hope was nearly abandoned, the sun as it arose one morning, revealed to the despairing castaways the outlines of an ancient ship floating on the water not more than a mile away.

Bert was the first to see it, and he awoke the others with a glad shout.

"There she is at last!" he cried. "The treasure ship, the Santa Felicia, is ours!"

"That's the very ship, sure enough," said Ken, "but we can't live on it, now that we have found it."

"Why not?"

"We can't eat bars of gold."

"Hm! that reminds me that I've lost the one I had," said Dink. "Wish I had it now."

Bert and Dink used the paddle alternately, and in the course of an hour or more reached the old vessel, which they recognized as the same one they had seen through the fog.

They clambered on board, glad to find a shelter, at all events, and then Dink proposed that they explore the cabin and hold.

They advanced toward the cabin doors, but had taken but a few steps when a man appeared in the doorway.

"Good-morning, friends," he said, with a sneer. "You see I am here before you."

It was Dan Stillwater, the former mate of the Sunshine.

CHAPTER XVI.

MORE DISAPPOINTMENTS

Stillwater again!

After being supposed dead, the man had appeared, and on the same vessel with Ken and his friends.

As the four companions stepped toward the cabin of the old ship, so fortunately discovered by them; the man appeared, and said:

"Welcome, my friends, to this old ship. You will find accommodations forward. I live in the cabin myself, and I suppose that is not good enough for you."

"So, so, you escaped at the time of the storm, did you?" said Dink. "You stole our boat, too, I suspect."

Stillwater laughed, scornfully, and retorted:

"All is fair in war, my friend. I might refuse to let you stay here, but I won't be so hard as that."

"Thank you," said Ken, bitterly. "It might be a more difficult affair than you suppose to get rid of us, now that we are here."

"Don't tempt the miserable villain," whispered Mabel. "Who knows but that he may be armed?"

"You can go or stay, as suits you best," said Stillwater, carelessly. "It is a matter of indifference, so long as I am not bothered with your society."

So saying he turned and entered the cabin, closing and locking the door behind him.

"We might as well explore the place, now that we are

here," said Bert. "Come, Dink, let's you and I see what accommodations it affords, and afterward report to Ken."

Ken and Mabel remained by the rail amidships, while the others went forward to investigate.

The fore-castle was below decks, and was reached by a companionway, over which a small house was built, large enough for one to stand upright in before descending.

There was an iron hand-rail on either side, which was nearly eaten away with rust; the steps being warped and worn and appearing likely to give way at any moment.

The fore-castle deck was about eight feet below, so that a tall man could stand upright in the place, but would have to bend to get into the upper berths.

The place seemed dark and close, and it was not without some misgivings that the two comrades began the descent.

They found it to be the width of the ship, and fifteen feet at its extreme length, with bunks built around its sides sufficient for twenty men.

A few old and worm-eaten chests, some rags of clothes, and one or two rusty cutlasses, comprised the entire contents of the place, the air of which was hot and stifling.

Bert opened one of the chests, but found only some half-rotten clothes, a rusty knife and an old pistol.

"Not very promising, this," the young fellow remarked. "If this is the Santa Felicia I would like to run across some of her treasure."

"We don't know that it isn't," returned Dink; "and if so we find, just bear in mind, that jewels and gold, so I've been told, are stored in the hold, and I'll be so bold as to take all I can fold in my jacket so old."

"There's something more important than gold and jewels," said Bert, soberly.

"May I be so bold as to ask what that is?"

"Food," said Bert, concisely.

Dink gave utterance to a long whistle and said:

"Right; you're bright, but we can fight and prove our might and make that might give us a bite."

"Do you mean Stillwater?"

"Yes."

"You will get nothing from him. He would see us starve first; yes, starve himself, even, sooner than give us food; and, besides, I doubt if he has very much himself."

The remaining chests were broken open, but nothing of any value could be discovered.

There was no means of communication between the fore-castle and the hold, and the explorers now returned to the deck.

"We might rig up a room down there for Mabel," said Bert, "while we can fix a place for ourselves up forward. It is not very inviting, but it is better than an old raft."

"Did you find any of the treasure?" asked Ken.

"No; nor do we even know that it is the Santa Felicia."

"Look yonder on the cabin door."

Bert glanced toward the point indicated, and saw, partly obliterated:

"SAN F BON."

"Well, what do you make of that?" asked Bert, carelessly.

"That the vessel is the Santa Felicia, of Lisbon. It is clear enough."

"Can you find the name on anything else?"

"No."

"Did the Spanish sailors of a hundred years ago sleep in bunks or hammocks?"

"In hammocks, I suppose."

"Well, then, this is a younger vessel than the Santa Felicia, although it is old enough, heaven knows. We shall find no treasure here. We will be lucky if we find food."

"That is so—I had forgotten—perhaps Stillwater—that is, for Mabel's needs—we can look out—don't you think we had

better ask——" and Ken brought his broken sentences to a pause.

The cabin door opened and Stillwater came out, bearing in one hand a tin plate containing meat and bread, and in the other a metal cup.

He sat down on an old chest, put the food and drink before him, and proceeded to eat very leisurely.

Ken advanced a few paces, and was about to speak when Stillwater placed a dagger on the chest in front of him.

"Can you see this poor girl in want of food and refuse her a bite?" cried Ken, excitedly, for he knew what the knife meant.

It meant that if they wanted food they must fight for it.

"She may have it on one condition," said Stillwater, with an evil smile.

"And that is——"

"That she becomes my wife!"

"Wretch!" cried Mabel, turning away. "I would sooner starve."

"Enough," said Ken. "We ask no favors of you. The same hand that fed the ravens will feed us."

He ate and drank to the last crumb and to the last drop, prolonging the meal so as to the more tantalize his late companions.

Then he took a pipe from his pocket, filled and lighted it, and sat in the doorway, calmly smoking.

"Sorry I can't offer you a pipe," he said, sneeringly, "but that is a sign of friendship, and I hate the whole crowd of you. You can stay on the old hulk, though, if you fancy it."

Bert walked forward and beckoned Ken to follow.

"I am satisfied that this is not the old treasure ship," he said, when they were out of hearing. "If it were, that scoundrel would never have suffered us to come aboard."

"It matters but little," said Ken, musingly. "What we most need is food and water."

"We shall have both, and not be beholden to that wretch for them, either," said Bert.

He and Dink now took the raft and went out upon the weed, returning in an hour with several pounds of fish, a small sea turtle, a number of crabs, and a small land bird, which seemed utterly exhausted, and had alighted on the raft only to meet its death.

The turtle was cooked in its shell over a fire built on the raft, the bird was roasted, and the fish cooked in the same way.

The raft could not be greatly injured by the fire, and it was little matter now, at any rate, as there was other shelter.

That night rain fell heavily, and the wanderers secured enough water to last them for two or three weeks.

"We are not under any obligation to Mr. Dan Stillwater for anything, that I can see," observed Bert; "and if I could be certain of finding a better ship than this, I would leave at once."

"It isn't the old Spanish ship, and so I'd as soon go as not," said Dink, "and let her rot, and go to pot."

"You couldn't eat gold if you had it," observed Bert, sensibly.

"No, nor buy grub with it; but, all the same, if I was sure of getting out of this place I wouldn't mind having a few thousands."

"You can have all my share for one more look at my old home," said Ken; and the others felt very much the same.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FATE OF THE RED GULL

The whaling bark, Morning Star, of New Bedford, Captain John Holmes, Master, was cruising in the neighborhood of the

Azores Islands one pleasant summer day, when the man at the masthead, forward, noticed a strange object flying about the vessel.

"Waal, you can blow me," he observed, "if I haven't seed some queer things in my different v'y'ges, but if this ain't the queerest, I won't say so."

Just then Captain Holmes, who was on deck, chanced to look up and saw Jack Hulks, the seaman in question, gazing in the air above his head instead of at the sea, as he was supposed to do.

"Hi, there, you Jack!" he called out. "You don't expect to see whales up in the clouds, do you? Where's your eyes, man?"

"No, sir, I don't look for whales up there," returned Jack, looking down, his hand on the spar in front of him; "but I would like to know what kind of a bird that 'ere is. I've cruised in all sorts of waters and seen all sorts of things, but I'll be blowed if ever I see a red gull afore."

Captain Holmes sent for his marine glasses, and levelled them at the strange object.

The bird was of a dull red, but its color was singular enough to make it noticeable even at that height, for it was now far above the top of the mast.

Presently, however, it swooped down below, where Jack Holmes stood perched between sea and sky, and the skipper obtained a better view of it.

"'Tis kind o' curious, I own!" muttered Captain John. "I thought it might be one o' them red flaymingers we hear about, but them fellers has long legs and this one hasn't."

"What do you make her out, cap'n?" asked Jack Hulks.

"What do you make her out yourself, Jack?" asked the skipper, in true, non-committal, Yankee fashion.

"If I was axed, sir, I should say it was a gull, but I never see a red one of that specie afore."

The bird now flew up into the heavens again, and was nearly lost to sight, and Jack Hulks turned his attention to the ocean again.

He was up there to look for whales and not strange birds, and once having called attention to the creature he did not think it worth while to bother any further with it.

The captain, however, was gifted with more than the usual amount of Yankee curiosity, and when the strange bird once swooped down toward the deck, he went below and brought out an old fowling piece with which he sometimes amused himself.

Having seen that the weapon was properly loaded and primed, the skipper took a position on the quarter-deck and awaited his opportunity.

He had not waited long before the gull came swooping down toward him, the sun glowing upon its red body and wings until they shone like fire.

Taking careful aim the skipper discharged his weapon, and in a moment the gull fell upon deck with one wing broken.

One of the sailors seized it before it could flutter away, and held it in a firm grasp.

The bird struggled and tried to bite its captor, uttering discordant cries the while as if enraged at its misadventure.

"It's a gull, plain enough, sir," said the man, "and it ain't all red, only a part, and—hallo! what's this?"

The skipper had reached the main deck by this time and saw the man take a flat package from under one of the wings of the wounded bird.

"Better kill it, Sam," he said, quietly, and in an instant the bird's throat was cut, the deck being dyed as red as the creature itself.

The skipper then took the package and retired to the cabin, while all hands gathered about the dead bird to examine it.

At the end of ten minutes the captain called the mate into the cabin, and said:

"Look here, Mr. Shaw, this is the funniest thing I ever did see. That 'ere red gull has been carrying around a paper, wrapped up in oilskin, for about four years, and what do you suppose is into it?"

"Can't tell, sir."

"Waal, it's news of a shipwreck, and a party o' five aboard a water-logged ship down yonder in the weed."

"More'n likely it's a yarn, sir."

"If it is, it's the best put-together yarn I ever see, sir. The ship Sunshine, Cap'n Liphallet Howard, struck by lightnin' off Good Hope, the skipper killed and the mate and three seamen and the cap'n's daughter left aboard, day and date and names given, all correct."

"Latitude and longitude given, sir?" asked Shaw, doubtfully.

"No, sir, couldn't get them; instruments carried off in the boats or busted."

"Most of them yarns gives the reckoning, but sometimes it isn't straight. Picked up a bottle myself once, and when we come to look on the chart for the place the ship was wrecked, found it in the middle of the Afrikin desert."

"This 'ere paper says they're down in the Sargasser, the big bed o' weed, you know, twixt here and the Bermudas, but they don't know exactly where."

"Do you ax my opinion of it, sir?" asked Mr. Shaw, winking at the skipper.

"Well, what is it?"

"That the hull thing is a hoax."

"They painted the gull red so's it would be seen."

"O' course. That's all right. They wanted it to be seen."

"But it's nearly four years——"

"Well, they could ha' made it a hundred if they liked. A stroke of the pen would do it."

"Well, the names is given out in full—Kenneth Gordon, Robert Ransom, Daniel Stillwater, the mate, Mabel Howard, Dinkey Bight and then the cap'n——"

"O' course. No durned fool has done it, and he's got everything regular like. I don't dispute that them names belongs to real people, nuther, but as far as going hunting for them among the gulf-weed is concerned, I don't believe in it."

"Who said we was going huntin' fur 'em?" snapped the captain, not so much for the sake of argument as on account of surprise at having his secret thoughts so shrewdly divined.

"Nobody," returned Shaw, "but I s'pose that paper asks for some one to come and help 'em out, don't it?"

"To be sure."

"That's what they all do. The hull thing's a trick, and I don't believe they's any vessel called the Sunshine, nor no Cap'n Liphallet Howard, nor nothing."

"Mebby not," returned the captain unconvinced and only partly silenced; "but all the same I guess I'll keep the docky-ment. It's a cur'osity, anyhow."

So the packet was kept, and likewise the red gull, the latter being stuffed, mounted and placed in the cabin, where it became the one topic of conversation for several days.

Captain John Holmes and Mr. Shaw argued the matter at length upon several occasions, but, at last, as neither would yield, it was considered best for the peace of the ship to let the subject drop.

A month or two later the Morning Star having made a fair catch, and the season on the western grounds being late, Captain Holmes decided to go further north, where, at this season, he would find more whales than where he then was.

He had decided to leave and had started, in fact, when Jack Hulks shouted down from aloft, the welcome hail:

"There she blows! Pint on the weather-bow, sir, an' headin' straight for us. Don't make out but one, but he looks like a smasher."

"Get ready the starboard boat! Down from aloft! Better lower two, Mr. Shaw. We hain't got oil enough but what we mought as well pick up a little extry. Lower away, boys! All ready, Mr. Shaw? Down you go, then. Off we go! Pull steady, boys, and we'll have this greaser afore he knows we're after him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN EXCITING CHASE.

The two boats from the Morning Star approached the whale, which Jack Hulks had seen, head on, or in as straight a line for his head as could be drawn, that being the best direction they could take without being discovered.

If the monster had been going in the same direction as the boats, the latter could approach on one side and stand a good chance of not being seen; but in this case they must keep him directly ahead or he would see them and perhaps take alarm, sound and not come up again till many miles had been placed between him and his enemies.

The captain's boat was in advance, Jack Hulks pulling the bow oar and the skipper steering, while close behind came Mr. Shaw's boat with a full crew of six men, four sailors, the harpooner and the mate.

"Pull steady, boys," said the skipper, "and don't make no more noise than you can help. He's a big feller and will show fight, I guess."

The whale was coming on at a good pace, and as the men rowed a smart stroke there was every chance of the two coming together in a short time.

"Stand up, Joe!" whispered the captain, and the harpooner put up his oar, arose, grasped his weapon and made ready for a dart.

Scarcely twenty feet separated the whale and the boat when Captain Holmes changed his course suddenly and shot past the monster on the right.

The harpooner, watching his opportunity, hurled his weapon at a point just back of the creature's hump, driving it a foot deep into the blubber.

"Stern all!" yelled the skipper, as he threw the boat around, and the whale dashed by, churning the water into foam with his immense flukes.

One stroke of that enormous tail would have annihilated the boat and all in it, and the escape was a narrow one.

As it was, the spray was thrown to a great height as the whale lashed the waves, and every one in the boat was drenched to the skin.

The line began to run out at a frightful speed, but the skipper suddenly took a double turn around the bitt, and the boat was then towed by the fleeing leviathan.

The mate quickly darted to one side as the whale came up, the harpooner making a quick and very excellent throw of the harpoon as the latter went by.

The weapon entered the whale's side close to the first one, and then, the mate having made his line fast, there were two boats towing behind instead of one.

"Let him go," muttered the captain, as he changed places with the harpooner, the latter now steering, "we can stand it as long as he can, I guess. Two boats ain't no small load to carry, and I reckon he'll want to quit presently."

The immense creature was not disposed to stop, evidently, for he rushed through the water at a frightful rate, leaving a foaming wake behind him.

"Pretty big, ain't he, Jack?" said Captain Holmes to the bow oarsman.

"Over a hundred foot, I reckon, sir," answered Jack Hulks. "He's good for a hundred and forty barrels, I guess."

"More'n that, Jack," said the captain, who was ready to argue on any and every point that might come up. "He ought to go a hundred and sixty."

"Shouldn't wonder if he went over that, sir, come to look at him again."

"No, he won't--no, he won't, Jack," interposed the skipper, hastily. "Fact is, I don't think he'll go to a hundred and forty, now."

"P'raps not, sir," answered Hulks, biting a piece from a plug of tobacco and proceeding to chew it, contemplatively.

The whale continued at the same mad rate and the vessel was put about so as to keep up with the boats.

An hour later the monster slackened his pace and gave the captain a chance to draw closer to him, the line being taken in twenty or thirty fathoms.

"Guess we'll tire him out afore dark," mused Captain Holmes. "We don't want to let the critter sound, for then we mought lose him, arter all."

"No danger of his sounding, sir," said Hulks, slyly.

"Yes, there is, Jack; yes, there is a big danger, my boy. Pull hearty, boys, we don't want to lose him."

The men now took to their oars again and drew up several fathoms on the whale, who had now paused as if uncertain what to do next.

Captain John seized a long and very sharp lance, and as the boat-steerer put him alongside, drove the weapon several times deep into the creature's side.

The mate now came up and gave the captain his assistance, as the whale was beginning to create considerable of a disturbance.

"Hallo, here's three irons!" exclaimed the mate. "Did you put in a couple, sir?"

"No, only one, and that held as tight as one," answered Captain Holmes, plunging the sharp lance right into the vitals of the leviathan.

The dying cetacean made a terrible flurry, and the boats drew away to avoid being swamped.

"What did you say about three irons, Mr. Shaw?" asked the skipper.

"I said they was three. I only put in one. T'other one hadn't no line onto it. I guessed, maybe, you threw too quick."

"No, sir, my man throwed just right, didn't he, Jack?"

"Ay, ay, sir—but Mr. Shaw is right about the extra iron. I saw three myself."

"Reckon somebody else has been chasing him some time. It ain't nothing to find four or five irons sticking in a critter, and some of 'em nigh onto forty years old, too. We'll pull her out when we get home and look for the marks on her."

The whale now went into its final convulsions and presently turned over upon his side, dead.

The boats then proceeded to tow the huge carcass to the vessel, where it was secured alongside by chains let out fore and aft.

As it was not late in the day, the work of cutting in and stripping off the blubber was begun at once.

A platform was suspended from the side, extending over the water, and upon this stood the captain and one or two of the men, with spades and lances, cutting off the great pieces of blubber, which were then hauled in on deck by means of a block and tackle.

"Here's our irons," cried the captain, when the carcass was turned over. "Now we'll see who throwed the extry one."

"Looks as if it might be loaded," muttered Jack Hulks. "There's a can fixed to the end of it."

"So there is," said the skipper, the strange iron in his hand. "It's the queerest thing I ever did see. Tain't a regular harpoon at all. Looks like as if somebody hammered it out'n a crowbar."

"Skipper," said Jack Hulks, "the same feller that sent that red gull adrift made this 'ere harpoon. D'ye see that can? They's papers in there as sure as my name is Jack Hulks."

"Maybe they are, Jack, maybe they are," mused the captain. "Here, somebody, fetch an axe, and we'll soon find out what's here."

The message sent by the whale had fallen into good hands at last!

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND AT LAST

"There, Ken, old chap, I think that will do first rate. You won't find many better cabins than that, considering what we have had to work with."

"No, indeed, and I am quite satisfied."

For a month or more Bert and Dink had been strengthening the raft until it was now quite an acceptable dwelling place.

Ken had helped, occasionally, though his work had been to provide food for the party, as they would not receive favors from Stillwater, under the conditions he imposed.

Driftwood and portions of the old wreck had been used, and from them a shelter, which Bert called a cabin, had been constructed for Mabel's use.

The party intended to leave the old ship as soon as a suitable raft could be made, and upon this they were going to try and reach the open ocean.

This was a stupendous undertaking, to be sure, but anything was preferable to remaining longer in the sea of grass, and, in any event, their situation was perilous.

Ken had a smaller raft, and upon this he would cruise around in the open spaces or along the edge of the weed, picking up food, sometimes meeting with considerable success, and often finding nothing.

It was not the most sumptuous fare that the castaways lived upon, and they all showed the evidences of privation and lack of proper food, though none of them, not even Mabel, complained.

Stillwater himself fared no better than the rest, for the supplies which he had brought away from the Sunshine, in the boat, were now exhausted, and he had to depend upon what the sea afforded him for his living.

When at last the raft was completed, the four friends took possession and started upon their long and perilous journey, knowing not what might be their fate, but hoping for the best.

Stillwater came to the rail as they pushed off, and said:

"So you are going, are you? Do you want a passenger?"

"Berths all taken," answered Dink, "and your room is better than your company."

"There is nothing to prevent my following you," sneered the man. "I have the boat."

"Don't you intend to take the treasure home with you? Tried to fool us, didn't you? Kept everything locked up so's we'd think the gold was aboard, hey?"

"You're a fool!" hissed Stillwater.

"Much obliged. You're a knave and that's worse. Good-by to you. Some day I will compose a poem to your memory. Haven't time now. Good morning."

By nightfall the old vessel, the name of which they had never ascertained, had faded from sight and soon myriads of stars shone above them, the pole star, their guide, being especially bright.

"If we have no worse weather than this all the way we can't complain," remarked Bert.

"We are in a zone of comparative calms, old fellow," rejoined Ken. "Wait till we reach the open ocean, if we ever do. Then, unless a ship comes to our aid, we are lost, indeed."

"I trust to that," said Bert, quietly.

Many weary weeks passed, during which the castaways made slow but steady progress northward.

It seemed a miracle that they were able to sustain life on such food as the sea afforded, but hope was still alive in their hearts, and even Ken, despondent as he had always been, was kept up by the faith of his comrades.

Now and then they passed a bit of wreckage, and at rare intervals a rotting hulk, abandoned to its fate.

In the neighborhood of these ancient relics there was always an abundance of fish, and the voyagers always bestirred themselves at such times to provide a liberal supply for the future.

Many weeks had passed and nothing had been seen of Stillwater; the general belief being that he had remained on board the old wreck in preference to trusting to the ocean in his boat.

At last they reached, not the edge of the grassy sea, but a region where the winds were more frequent, where the sea was subject to more disturbances, and where they were in more peril on that very account.

The floating meadows still lay before them, far beyond their vision, and, as before, the evidences of wreck and disaster were frequently seen.

One day, when the wind was fresher than it had been for some time, Bert descried a vessel at a great distance, apparently, and pointed it out to his companions.

"We are saved!" he cried, in a transport of joy. "Do you see that ship?"

"Yes, but she has no sail up," returned Ken.

"Another old treasure ship, I suppose," muttered Dink, "with lots of gold, as I've been told."

"Yes, it must be only another of these castaway," mused Bert, sadly. "Perhaps it is like the old Sunshine, and we shall find food aboard of her."

"Perhaps," said Ken.

They rowed and drifted along, and just as the sun was setting reached the wreck.

It was old and weather-beaten, the masts had gone by the board, the bulwarks were broken away, and green moss grew on her sides and along the water line.

"Not much encouragement here," observed Ken. "She is so low in the water that we were deceived as to the distance."

"Let's step aboard," said Bert, and the four friends left the raft and went aboard, where for years no human being had been.

"Another relic of past greatness," muttered Ken, standing where the rays of the setting sun fell full upon his wasted form. "After all, I am afraid that we must expect a similar fate and perish here, forgotten by the world, like this old ship."

"Forgotten!" cried Bert, darting forward to where the last rays of sunlight fell upon the tarnished gilt ornamental scroll work on the figurehead. "Look there and tell me if you have ever heard of that name?"

"Santa Felicia!"

There it was in gold letters, cut deep into the wood, the name of the old Spanish treasure ship.

Above the name was the remains of what were once the head and bust of a beautiful woman carved from a single block of wood, the head being surrounded by a golden glory, such as is pictured in old representations of saints and martyrs.

"The Santa Felicia!" cried Dink, Ken and Mabel, in a breath.

"The old floating treasure-house at last," returned Bert; "and I would give all the wealth it contains for food enough to satisfy my hunger for once. What a mockery this gold is!

We are worse off now than ever we were, and yet we are worth millions!"

"Yes, but I see nothing," said Dink.

"Wait till morning, my friend, and you will see all you desire, and more, too!" said Bert, and at that moment the sun descended into the sea and the light was gone.

CHAPTER XX.

CONFIRMATIONS

"Well, Mr. Shaw, what do you think of this 'ere dockyment now?"

"Well, sir, all I can say is that it's most extr'ornary."

"Do you believe it now?"

"I ain't prepared to say, sir; but I repeat, it's most extr'ornary."

The whale taken by the Morning Star having been cut up, boiled down and tried out, and the vessel cleaned, Captain John Holmes had given his attention to the papers found in the can attached to the harpoon found embedded in the marine monster they had captured.

"The names are the same, you see," continued the skipper, he and the mate being seated at a table in the cabin, "and the particulars is the same; only more so."

"Well, whoever got up that yarn took a great deal of trouble, I'm thinking."

"Yarn, sir! It's truth and no yarn at all. Do you s'pose that a body is going to take all that trouble in rigging up a harpoon and all that, and writing out all this story and sealing it up, just for a noax?"

"Folks go to a deal of pains to fool other folks, sometimes, sir," returned Mr. Shaw, somewhat dubiously.

"So they do, sir; and folks will take a deal o' pains to let other folks know where they are when they want to be rescued, too, sir," said the skipper, with considerable vehemence.

"Well, all I can say is, that it's most extr'ornary," replied the mate, falling back upon his original statement, as though that comprised everything that could be said.

"Yes, sir, and it's true, every word of it. Then there's another p'int: this story of the old treasure ship. Wouldn't mind running across her myself. It'd be a sight better'n finding a hundred barrels of amber grease."

Ambergris, by the way, is worth its weight in gold, as a general thing, and the whaler that comes across a whale with a deposit of this valuable substance inside him, is considered a lucky man.

"Reckon that'd go ahead of your amber grease, cap'n. 'Pears to me this is a pretty big yarn all 'round."

"Yarn, sir! What do you mean by yarn?" demanded the skipper, with great irritation.

"Waal, we'll say story, then. I got in the way o' callin' all these things yarns, you know."

"Well, I say I wouldn't mind going after them fellers and seeing if they've come across the treasure yet."

"What! Sail through that ocean of weed? Excuse me, captain, but I don't want any of it."

"Vessels has gone through it, and I don't see why I can't."

"And give up your v'y'ge?"

"Won't it be wuth more'n the v'y'ge if we get the treasure?"

"I suppose so, but it seems to me like trying to find a chest of gold at the foot of the rainbow."

"H'm! You always was a doubtin' sort of a fellow, Shaw," said the skipper, as he arose, put away the document in a locker and waddled out of the cabin.

Nothing more was said, but on the following day the Morn-

ing Star fell in with another whaling vessel, and the pair hove to, while the captain of the stranger came on board the Morning Star to pay Captain Holmes a friendly visit.

Mr. Shaw returned the compliment by going over to the other vessel, and the two crews proceeded to enjoy themselves in the exchange of civilities.

Captain Holmes related the circumstances attending the finding of the document attached to the harpoon to his fellow commander, at dinner, the other being greatly interested.

"Excuse me a minute, captain," he said, arising and hurrying on deck.

"Is Wilks aboard?" he asked of one of his own sailors whom he met in the waist.

"Yes, sir; in the forecabin, spinning yarns."

"Ask him to come this way."

"Ay, ay, sir."

A tall, bronzed, intelligent-looking man presently came aft, and looked inquiringly at the captain.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes; come below."

The two men descended to the cabin, when the strange captain said:

"Captain Holmes, this is one of my crew. I think he can throw some light upon what you have been telling me."

"I want to know!" exclaimed Captain John, in great astonishment.

"Take a seat, Wilks," said the other. "You were shipwrecked some four or five years ago, were you not?"

"Yes, sir. I was second mate of the ship Sunshine, Captain Eliphalet Howard, of New York, bound home from China."

"Where were you wrecked?"

"Off Good Hope. We were struck by lightning and abandoned the ship. It was on fire, and we left it. The captain was killed by a falling mast. The mate and several others were left behind."

"How did that happen?"

"We waited for them, alongside; the sea was running very high, our line parted and we were swept away."

"You never saw them again?"

"No. Night came on and we were driven by wind and tide far from the ship. Then it came on to rain and we lost sight of her, the fire being put out."

"How many of you escaped?"

"Two boatloads at first, but one boat was lost. I and two others were all who survived out of our party."

"Who were the men left on board?"

"The mate, Mr. Stillwater, three or four sailors and the captain's daughter."

"Do you know who the men were?"

"No; for many were killed or washed overboard previous to that."

"Was there a young fellow called Gordon in the crew?"

"Gordon? Let me see. I wonder if that could be Ken, as we called him."

"Yes, his name was Kenneth. Was there a man called Dink, and another by the name of Ransom?"

"Yes, sir. Have they been heard of?"

"They have. Read that;" and the captain handed Wilks the strange document.

The man read it very attentively, and then said:

"I don't doubt a word of all this. Young Gordon was a fine fellow, and Stillwater hated him. Since the man is not dead, I can say what I think. Nobody liked him, and I never saw any one who could be more thoroughly disagreeable."

"Young Gordon was not the sort of man to invent a thing of this sort?"

"No, sir, and neither was Bert. You may rely upon the

genuineness of this document. How ingenious the boy was, to be sure!"

"Waal, I vum, if that isn't the greatest thing I ever heard on!" cried Captain Holmes. "It's the singularest thing that both o' these papers should fall into my hands after traveling all over the ocean. Do you really think that the young men are still on board that vessel."

"It seems likely enough. She is water-logged and can never sink, or at least not within the lifetime of these boys. Consider where she is, out of the reach of winds and tides and storms."

"What do you think of the old Spanish vessel?"

"It is quite likely that she is somewhere in the sea of grass as well as the Sunshine."

"I want to know! All that money floating about and no one to claim it."

"A vessel will last a long time under such circumstances, and those old ships were built much better than we build them nowadays."

"It mought be wuth a feller's while to go down there, moughtn't it?"

"Yes, it might, indeed."

"But there's a good deal o' risk."

"There is some risk, but so there is in anything that pays."

"Well, I don't think I'd care to run the chances. There may be money in it, but more likely they isn't."

"There are lives to be saved."

"Oh, I don't, s'pose them fellers is alive yet. They'd starve or die of fever."

Captain Holmes did not believe all he said, but he was greatly afraid that the other captain would take it into his head to go in search of the treasure, and therefore wished to appear indifferent.

If he seemed excited he was afraid that the other would think that there was really something in the matter, and would want to prove it.

Consequently he tried to appear careless, and as if questioning the feasibility of the search, while all the time he was dying to get away and be the first on the spot.

"If she is afloat no one knows where she is," said Wilks: "but if you were to ask me where I thought the water-logged ship to be I believe I could point out the very spot."

"Show me, just for the fun o' the thing," said Holmes, bringing out a chart.

Wilks looked it over carefully, seemed to be making a reckoning and finally placed his finger on a point nearly midway in the Sargasso, from its lowest southern edge to its northern limit.

"H'm! that's a good bit off," muttered Captain Holmes, carelessly making a pencil mark at the point where Wilks had put his finger. "I don't think I'll go there."

This was not the truth, however, for the skipper was never more settled on anything in his life.

The dream of gold had filled his mind, and he could no more have shaken off the desire for riches than he could have flown.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR

"Of what use is all this gold since it cannot buy us food?" So asked Ken, as he sat on a broken spar, looking out over the wilderness of waters.

The Santa Felicia had been found at last, and the treasure in the hold was estimated at hundreds of thousands of dol-

lars, but if it had been hundreds of millions they would have been no better off.

There were chests full of gold and silver bars, bags of gold coin, boxes piled high with jewels, and sacks full of costly ornaments, golden candlesticks, vases and the like, together with dishes and utensils of the most elaborate design and the best workmanship.

But, after all, possessing all this treasure, they were on the verge of starvation, and it seemed only to mock them.

The vessel was old and very much decayed, and the chances were that in a few years more it would rot and fall apart, sending its precious load to the bottom to lie, with other unclaimed riches, till the end of the world.

"Cheer up, old fellow," said Bert. "We have come so far out of our troubles all right, and I see no reason why we won't go on to the end."

"The end is nearer than any of us imagine, I fancy."

"Never give up the ship, as Lord Nelson, or George Washington, or some other fellow said," observed Dink, "but keep a stiff upper lip and we'll give Davy Jones the slip and never lose our grip."

It was hard enough to be cheerful when they were slowly starving, when the wealth all around only seemed to mock their misery, and when hope seemed so long deferred.

One day Bert saw a rainbow far away in the east and pointed it out to Ken.

"There is the sign of our deliverance, my boy. Look at that and do not despair."

"Rainbows will shine on, long after I am dead. They are as illusive as all other signs."

"I shall pin my faith to that one, however," said Bert, cheerfully. "I don't intend to give up till the last."

The next day they saw some land birds, and Bert again tried to assure the rest that help was at hand.

Day after day passed, and the fate which threatened seemed nearer than ever before.

Without water, without food, surrounded by wealth, and yet dying of starvation.

One day, after a long and weary night, the sun arose, blood-red, from the sea and fell upon four forms stretched out upon the deck of the ancient vessel.

No breath nor motion seemed to stir them, and as the sun came up in a hot mist it bathed their faces in a red glow as though they were washed in blood.

Over the sea, as the sun arose, came a stately bark, her sails illumined with the light of the new day, her flag fluttering from the peak and all her canvas spread.

It was a strange sight in this wild place, for the only ships that came into that dead sea were those that would never go back to port, whose crews were ghosts, and whose sails were never unfurled.

On and on came the ship, and now it could be seen that she was no phantom, that there was life and activity on board, and that, like the rainbow, she bore the message of hope.

Captain John Holmes, of New Bedford, came on deck and looked around him as the sun arose over the dreary waste.

"Jack Hulks, ahoy!" he cried.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the seaman, coming on deck at that moment.

"What do you make out yonder thing to be?"

Jack took the captain's glass, gazed for some minutes in silence, and then said, slowly:

"It's an old hulk, sir, but I see no sign of life on her."

"Putty low down, ain't she?"

"Yes, sir, but not so low as she ought to be, being water-logged."

"This here is the verv spot corresponding to the p'int on the chart where Wilks put his finger, and I cal-lated yester-

"Well, I reckon my reckoning, that I'd ought to reach it by morning."

"Don't see no sign o' life over there, sir," added Jack. "Reckon she's a dead ship, and if they's anybody on board they're in the same condition."

"You don't see no signals?"

"Not a rag."

"Well, we'll keep on and have a look at her. She's a good ways off yet, Jack."

"Aye! five or six miles, I reckon."

An hour later the old hulk was more easily distinguished, and the skipper, after examining her, long and searchingly, through the glass, said to Jack:

"Do you make out anybody aboard her, Jack?"

"No, sir, not a soul."

"Do you think we might lower a boat?"

"Ask Mr. Shaw, sir."

"Shaw be blamed!" muttered the skipper. "Lower the boat, Jack, and get a crew. I'll be over."

A boat, manned by four sturdy fellows, with Captain John in the stern, moved through a watery lane toward an old, weather-beaten hulk that seemed like the ghost of past greatness, though she was a floating light in this weird spot.

"That 'ere vessel was never water-logged," muttered Jack Hulks, "though I reckon she's old enough to have been in the wars of the ropes, wherever them was."

"Pull around to the stern, Jack, and we'll see if we can see her name."

The stern was low in the water, however, and no name was to be seen.

The men then rowed to the bow, and here Captain Holmes exclaimed:

"Hold up, boys. What's this here? There's a figgerhead of a woman, with a straw hat on her head, or suthin' like it, and her name is—great Jehosaphat!"

"Rather singular name for a woman, ain't it, sir?"

"No, no, that ain't her name; it's the Saint Felix or suthin' like that, but what's more, it's the old ship what's got all the money on board!"

This statement produced the utmost excitement.

"Then we've missed t'other one and found the old money-box, arter all."

"Sure as you live. Pull around easy, boys. Make her fast, Jack."

Captain Holmes and Jack Hulks stepped on board the Santa Felicia and met with another surprise.

Four bodies, three men and a woman, lay stretched out upon the deck.

"My word! somebody has been here before us, cap'n."

"So they have, Jack, so they have! Poor critters!"

Jack Hulks knelt by the side of one of the bodies and placed his hand on its breast.

A flush came into his face, and he seemed greatly excited.

Then he put his ear to the man's heart, felt of the pulse, and, lastly, took a little mirror from his pocket and placed it just above the man's mouth.

"What are you doing in there, Jack Hulks?" asked the skipper.

Jack Hulks looked at the glass, sprang to his feet, danced a hornpipe on the deck, and shouted:

"He's alive, skipper—he's alive, thank my stars! Send somebody for brandy and gruel and clothes. We'll save 'em yet!"

"Are you mad, Jack?"

"No, cap'n, only excited. They are all alive, but if we hadn't come along, Davy Jones would have claimed 'em before many hours. Hooray—hooray! We've found the money and all that, but we've done better yet—we've saved four precious lives, and I thank God that I've lived to see this day!"

"Amen, Jack!" said the skipper, with watery eyes and choking voice. "Do you know what I think?"

"No, sir. But first of all these poor creeters must be tended to or they'll slip away from us, arter all. If we hadn't found the treasure it would have paid us just to be able to save these lives!"

CHAPTER XXII.

AWAY FROM THE SEA OF GRASS.

A fresh breeze was blowing, the sky was dotted with fleecy clouds, the air was warm and mild, and the sea never looked more entrancing.

The whaling bark was making good headway through the weed, and as Captain Holmes trod the quarter deck he glanced to leeward with a look of satisfaction and observed:

"Wall, this yer voyage'll be the best payin' one I ever made. To say nothin' o' savin' them lives, we got more money out o' that 'ere old hulk than I ever thought was in the hull world."

At this moment Jack Hulks came on deck leading a young fellow who seemed just able to stand, and whose pale face and the dark rims beneath his eyes showed that he had been as near to death's door as one seldom goes and returns to life.

"Hallo, you Jack!" cried the skipper, coming down to the main deck. "You've got him up at last?"

"Aye, aye, sir! and mebbby the sea air'll do him good. He's the best off of the lot, but we'll have them up soon."

The young man was assisted to sit down upon a coil of rope near the main, and as he breathed in great draughts of the invigorating air seemed already to have gained strength.

He looked around him, heaved a deep sigh, and then asked:

"You rescued us from the old ship?"

"Yes, my lad, you and the rest of you," said Jack Hulks.

"And Mabel? Is she safe?"

"The young lady? Indeed, she is; but she's pretty sick yet. The skipper gave up his room to her."

"And Bert and Dink? Are they well, too?"

"Aye, aye, lad, they're all well," said the skipper; "but you mustn't go to talkin' too much. You're Gordon, I reckon?"

"Yes; but how did you know that? Did I talk in my sleep?"

"Him! You never said nothin', and we was afraid you never would," answered Hulks.

"What vessel is this?"

"The Morning Star, whaler, from New Bedford—"

"A whaler?" gasped Ken. "Ah, then you found the whale with our iron in him and came—"

"Yes, yes; but don't you go to gettin' excited, or you'll be sick again."

"I don't remember your coming. How long have we been on board?"

"'Bout a week."

"A week? And have I been unconscious so long?"

"Pretty nigh most of the time, boy."

"Where are you going?"

"Wall, when we get into the open sea I reckon we'll go home."

Ken looked out across the water, sighed deeply, and said:

"You have not found Mr. Stillwater, have you?"

"That's the mate, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, no; we hain't found him, and I dunno as we're anxious, seeing the kind o' man he is."

"Why? Do you know him?" asked Ken wearily.

"No, though I might say I've got a pretty good knowledge of him from the paper you writ out."

"You found the whale with our harpoon?"

"Yes; and I told ye so, and that ain't all we found. If you go into the cabin you'll find a sartin red sea-gull, stuffed and put on a——"

"What! you found both of our messages, then?" cried Ken, in great excitement, the perspiration breaking out upon his pale forehead.

"Now, don't go to gettin' narvous," muttered the skipper. "You've talked more'n enough for to-day."

"Thank God we are saved!" murmured Ken devoutly, as he rested his back against the mainmast; "but I wish you had saved Stillwater, too."

"That's very funny," mused Captain John Holmes, as he went into the cabin. "From all I kin make out the feller was a reg'lar pirate, but this poor boy is sorry he wasn't saved with the rest. So he mought ha' been if he'd been on the old hulk, but not bein' there, it was nateral to think he was dead. Funny they wasn't on the water-logged craft. Can't quite make that out."

The next day, Ken being much stronger, the skipper drew his story from him, and learned how he and his companions had happened to be on the Santa Felicia.

"Did you get the treasure?" asked the young fellow.

"Yes, and it's all in the hold, 'long o' a thousand bar'ls o' good sperm ile. Didn't expect to find sech a cargo when I left New Bedford."

"You deserve it all," said Ken gratefully. "You went out of your course on a venture to save our lives, and you ought to have the whole——"

"Now, now, I can't hear no sech talk as that. That 'ere gold must be shared, jest like anything else we find on a v'y'ge, so big a lay to me, an' so much to officers and men, and the rest to the owners. You bein' the owners in this case, gets the balance."

"By lay, you mean shares, I suppose?"

"Yes, something like. I gets the twenty-fifth, one dollar in twenty-five, Mr. Shaw gets the fortieth, the second mate the sixtieth, and the men the two hundred, the boatsteerers, cook and steward something more."

"Why not let us all share alike?"

"Wall, it ain't according to rules, and I reckon we won't change 'em."

"One time I would have given it all to be safe at home," murmured Ken.

This day Bert and Dink came on deck, considerably recovered, and all three joined in thanks to the captain and crew of the Morning Star for having saved their lives.

Mabel's recovery was more slow, but at last, thanks to good nursing and a strong constitution, she rallied, and was able to come upon deck and sit with the rest.

By this time they had left the Sargasso and were bound home, the skipper being more than satisfied with the result of his voyage.

At first Captain Holmes would not listen to any other division of the treasure than the one he had suggested, but Ken finally induced him to change his mind.

"I have figured it up," he said, "and find that you and your men will have something more than a quarter of the whole amount. Now, you must do better than that. Give us a quarter, and divide the rest among yourself and the men according to your own plan."

"No, sir! The money is yours, but I thought the men ought to have something. You take half, and me and the men'll take the other half."

"I prefer the other way."

"And I prefer mine. I reckon if we gave all hands five hundred apiece and myself and the officers a thousand, and you and your chums the rest, it'd be about right."

Ken smiled, for it was quite evident that the honest skipper

did not know the value of the cargo he had taken from the old Spanish ship.

However, he had other things to think of besides enlightening the captain at that time.

"Couldn't you go and find Stillwater?" he asked anxiously.

"Why, that there villain has tried to kill you no end of times, and if it hadn't been for him in the fust place you never would ha' been wrecked."

"True enough, but it is my duty to save him if I can."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Well, it'll be nigh on to a fortnight's sail to where we found you, and after that we might have to go clean down to open water again before we came on him, and then he mought be dead."

"True."

"I guess I know my duty as well as anybody, lad, but I don't think I'd orter put my ship and crew in danger to go on a wild goose chase arter a man that ain't fit for nothin' but the gallus, anyhow."

Ken could not press the matter, of course, and soon there arose another objection, and an insurmountable one.

They were now in the season of the fiercest gales, and they presently encountered one which caused them to make all haste to leave their quarters and go driving across the ocean at the maddest kind of a pace.

When the storm subsided—and it lasted for more than a week—they were nearly two thousand miles from where they had been rescued, and the question of returning was settled most decidedly in the negative.

"Well, he must be dead," mused Ken, as he thought of the man.

"Good thing, too, if you mean Stillwater!" blurted out Dink. "He's given us trouble enough, the skunk! But now he's all hunk, an' I ain't goin' to flunk, because I've got too much spunk."

"Of course he's dead," observed Bert. "Disappointment at not being able to do us any more mischief was too much for him."

Little as any of them dreamed, however, Dan Stillwater was destined to make considerable trouble for them all yet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNWELCOME REUNION.

"It'll be a bad night for us, Bert. I don't like the looks of things to windward."

"Neither do I, Ken; but the ship is stanch, and ought to weather the fiercest gale."

"I would not mind if I only were concerned, but there is Mabel. I fear more for her sake than for my own."

"Well, cheer up, captain, and it will come out all right, I reckon."

Five years have passed away since last we saw Ken and his friends, and in that time many things have happened.

The Morning Star weathered the gale by which she was beset, and in a few weeks' time reached New Bedford, where the story of her wonderful luck set the old town wild.

When the treasure taken out of the old Spanish ship was divided Ken, Bert, Dink and Mabel were found to possess something over one hundred thousand dollars apiece, Captain Holmes having about forty thousand, the mates ten thousand each, and the remainder of the crew, including harpooners, under officers and seamen, having twenty-five hundred dollars apiece all around.

Such good fortune had never been heard of, and the whaling interest suddenly looked up wonderfully.

Every whaler in port was made ready at once, for it seemed to be the general impression that fortunes were to be had for the mere asking, and crews could be secured without the least difficulty.

Captain Holmes purchased a new vessel, fitted her out, and set sail for the Arctic, caring to trust his luck in that direction rather than to finding another treasure ship.

Many vessels were fitted out, however, with the avowed intention of going after buried fortunes, Captain Kidd treasure islands and the like, the whole sea-going population having gone crazy on the subject.

Ken and Bert were more sensible, however, and put their money away where it would accumulate while they, in the meantime, sought to perfect themselves as seamen.

Two years later a staunch, seaworthy ship of twelve hundred tons, new from stem to stern, was launched, and named the Sargasso, being commanded by Captain Kenneth Gordon, Bert Ransom being her first officer.

Both young fellows had invested in the ship, but Ken was made captain, Bert protesting that it was no more than right.

"But you know as much as I do, Bert," said Ken.

"Well, you are the oldest, and then, you expect to take your wife along, so, of course, you must be captain. You couldn't take your wife if you were only the first mate."

It was true that Ken was intending to take his wife with him upon the first voyage of the Sargasso, and the reader does not need to be told who the lady was.

Ken and Mabel, more closely attached to each other than ever by their mutual sufferings, were married shortly before the launching of the ship, and it was Mabel herself who christened her as she slid from the ways into the water.

In due time the Sargasso set sail for China with an assorted cargo, the joint investment of the four friends.

Of course, Dink went along, but he was now called Mr. Bight, as he was third mate, and felt the importance of his new position.

The second mate was Mr. Wilks, formerly of Captain Howard's vessel, Ken having encountered him just before making up his crew and offering him the position.

"I heard of an old acquaintance of yours, Gordon," said Wilks, "just before I sailed for home."

"Indeed! Who was it?"

"Dan Stillwater."

"What! Then he is alive?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Did you see him, did you say?"

"No, I only heard of him. We got the news of a certain Stillwater being picked up at sea in an almost dying condition by a bark which arrived the day before we sailed."

"You did not hear the particulars?"

"No; but I have no doubt that it is your old enemy."

"Well, I never desired his death, and I am glad to hear that he is alive. It is not likely that we shall ever meet again."

"Hardly."

The Sargasso made a safe and speedy voyage to China, disposed of her cargo to advantage, made a trip to Australia and back, and finally, with a valuable cargo on board, set sail for New York.

They were in the Pacific Ocean, below the line, their homeward voyage about half finished, when one evening, as Ken came on deck, he observed to Bert that they were likely to have bad weather.

Mabel joined them while they were speaking, and at that moment the cry came down from aloft:

"Sail ho!"

"Where away?" asked Ken.

"Dead astern, sir. She looks like a topsail schooner with all sail set and going like the wind."

"She'll have to take in some of that canvas before long," muttered Ken, as he surveyed the stranger through the glass. "I can't understand why she is carrying so much, anyhow."

"She is racing, meebby," chuckled Dink, "going round the world on a wager. She don't look very heavily loaded."

By the time it grew dark the storm broke, and as the ship must take care of herself the topsail schooner was lost sight of.

The next day, however, she was seen, and did not appear to have received any material damage, as she was carrying all the sail she could bear up under.

"She is after us," mused Ken, "and I don't really understand why."

An hour later the stranger was within two or three miles, and at six bells in the forenoon watch she was close enough to hail the ship.

"Ahoy! What ship is that?" cried a man on the quarter-deck.

"The Sargasso, Captain Gordon, of New York," answered Mr. Wilks.

"He's near enough to see our name, without asking us that," muttered Dink. "I don't like the looks of the fellow."

"Which Captain Gordon is it?" asked the man on the schooner.

"Captain Kenneth Gordon, of New York, owner and master."

"Where are you bound?"

"Home."

"Not if I know it," answered the other, and at the same instant the schooner underwent a strange transformation.

A strip of white canvas just below her deck line was suddenly let fall, and half a dozen frowning ports were seen, the muzzle of a cannon protruding from each.

Then the flag of the newly-formed Southern Confederacy was suddenly unfurled from the peak, while a hoarse shout went up from the schooner's decks as a score of ferocious looking fellows appeared.

"What does this mean?" cried Ken, suddenly appearing on deck.

"You know that there is a war in our country," hurriedly explained Bert. "This is a rebel cruiser, and we have fallen into a trap."

"They haven't caught us yet!" hissed Ken, "and I intend to fight till the death."

"Sargasso ahoy!" cried a voice, and a newcomer appeared on the poop. "Surrender at once, or we'll blow you out of the water!"

The speaker was Dan Stillwater, the former mate of the Sunshine, whom Ken had last left on the old wreck in the sea of grass.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STILLWATER RESIGNS HIS COMMAND.

"So, then, Stillwater is as great a villain as ever," mused Ken; "and is now waging war against his own country. It is not surprising, however."

Meanwhile the Sargasso endeavored to escape from the cruiser, though with little success.

It did not appear to be Stillwater's aim to destroy the ship, but rather to capture her, for he followed close behind without firing a shot.

Thus matters stood for an hour or two, when the wind suddenly died out and left both vessels becalmed.

Then three or four boats were lowered from the schooner and the ship was attacked on three sides at once, a score of

more of villainous wretches, fully armed, clambering up the sides and at the bows.

The crew made some show of resistance, but fresh arrivals from the schooner so swelled the number of the enemy that they were soon compelled to succumb.

Then Stillwater advanced toward the after part of the ship where Ken and his three mates were standing together, and said, with his old wicked smile:

"A pleasant meet, this, Captain Gordon? Treasure seeking has evidently been successful in your case. Your ship's a beauty, and I propose to make her more so by transforming her into a war vessel, and taking up my quarters here. You will pardon my making you a prisoner for a time, I suppose?"

"Scoundrel!" hissed Ken. "Give me a sword, and face me single handed, and I will speedily cut short your villainous career."

"Seize them!" cried Stillwater, and a dozen men rushed up and seized Ken and Bert.

During the struggle Mabel suddenly appeared, and Stillwater smiled.

"Ah, my sweet Mabel again," he exclaimed. "By Heaven, you are more charming than ever."

"Don't you dare touch me, murderer and villain. So you have come out in your true colors at last, have you, traitor?"

Ken, Bert and Mr. Wilks were now overpowered and carried away, but Dink had disappeared, and could not be seen.

The captain and mates were confined in the run, the crew being put in the hold, and then Stillwater entered the cabin, where he ordered Mabel brought before him.

"I have a proposal to make to you, my dear," he said, still smiling.

"What new atrocity is it?" demanded Mabel scornfully.

"You desire to save your husband's life? Then be mine and both he and young Ransom shall be spared. Refuse and I will hang them before your eyes."

"Do your worst," answered Mabel firmly. "Kill them and I will kill myself and cheat you of your victim."

Stillwater laughed, and then answered:

"I will wait till to-morrow for your answer. If it is not a favorable one you know what to expect."

The unfortunate woman was led away and locked in her cabin, while Stillwater proceeded at once to make the proposed changes in the Sargasso.

The guns were brought over from the schooner, together with a considerable supply of small arms and ammunition, the privateer's crew taking up their quarters on the ship.

The guns were mounted on deck, the ammunition being taken below and stored along with a quantity of rifles, cutlasses and pistols, the prisoners being in the fore hold under the eye of two stalwart guards.

Only a few hands were left on board the schooner, and the two vessels sailed in company during the rest of the day and night.

The next morning Ken, Bert and Mr. Wilks were brought forward and placed just forward of the mainmast.

Ropes were then lowered and placed about the necks of the unhappy men, their arms and legs being securely pinioned.

At this moment Mabel was led forward, and Stillwater, allowing her to gaze upon the dreadful preparations for an instant, asked:

"Well, what's your answer?"

The poor woman seemed incapable of speech or action for a few seconds.

At last, while the hot blood rushed into her face, she cried in a burst of passion:

"Villain! You think me powerless, and would take advantage of my desperate situation to make me forget that I am a true wife. This, then, is your answer."

Upon the instant Mabel drew a gleaming revolver from the folds of her dress, and exclaimed:

"One shot is for my husband, one for myself, and the rest for you!"

"Seize the she fiend!" yelled the captain of the cruiser.

At that moment there was a startling interruption.

The fore hatches were suddenly thrown off, and the crew of the Sargasso, headed by Dink Bight, and all fully armed, sprang upon the deck.

"Surrender, you villains!" cried Dink, as he dashed, at the head of his men, upon Stillwater and a few of his adherents.

A desperate fight ensued.

Ken and the others were liberated and, supplied with weapons, joined in the affray immediately.

Stillwater raised the alarm, but his crew, or most of them, had been locked in the fore-castle, and were unable to join him.

While the fight waxed hottest, a startling cry was raised on board the schooner.

"Fire in the hold! The magazine is threatened."

A few minutes later there was a deafening explosion, and the schooner was nearly blown out of the water, disappearing almost immediately after.

The five men who attempted to escape by swimming over to the ship were seized by sharks and perished.

Ken was fighting hand-to-hand with Stillwater when the explosion took place.

There was a pause in the fight, and then Stillwater glared savagely about him, and as a dozen of the crew rushed up to support Ken, the villain, seeing that the fight was lost rushed suddenly to the rail, leaping overboard, and was seen no more.

The fighting at once ceased, and the remaining pirates—for they were no better—surrendered.

The surprise and the firing of the privateer had both been arranged by Dink during the night.

Having escaped capture, he had concealed himself in the hold, drugged the guard, released and armed his men, had swam over to the schooner and started the fire, and had then returned to the hold of his own ship, appearing just in time to thwart Stillwater's plans.

The Sargasso then proceeded, doubled the cape, and at last arrived home in safety.

His enemy dead, his ventures successful, and his life a happy one, there was now nothing for Ken to grieve over or lose hope, for fortune smiled upon him, and life seemed at its best.

He fitted out and commanded a privateer, and did his country good service, going into business again when the war was over, and increasing his already large fortune, and so let us take leave of him and his chums, who still live, and often talk over the days they spent on the old Sunshine when LOST IN THE SEA OF GRASS.

THE END.

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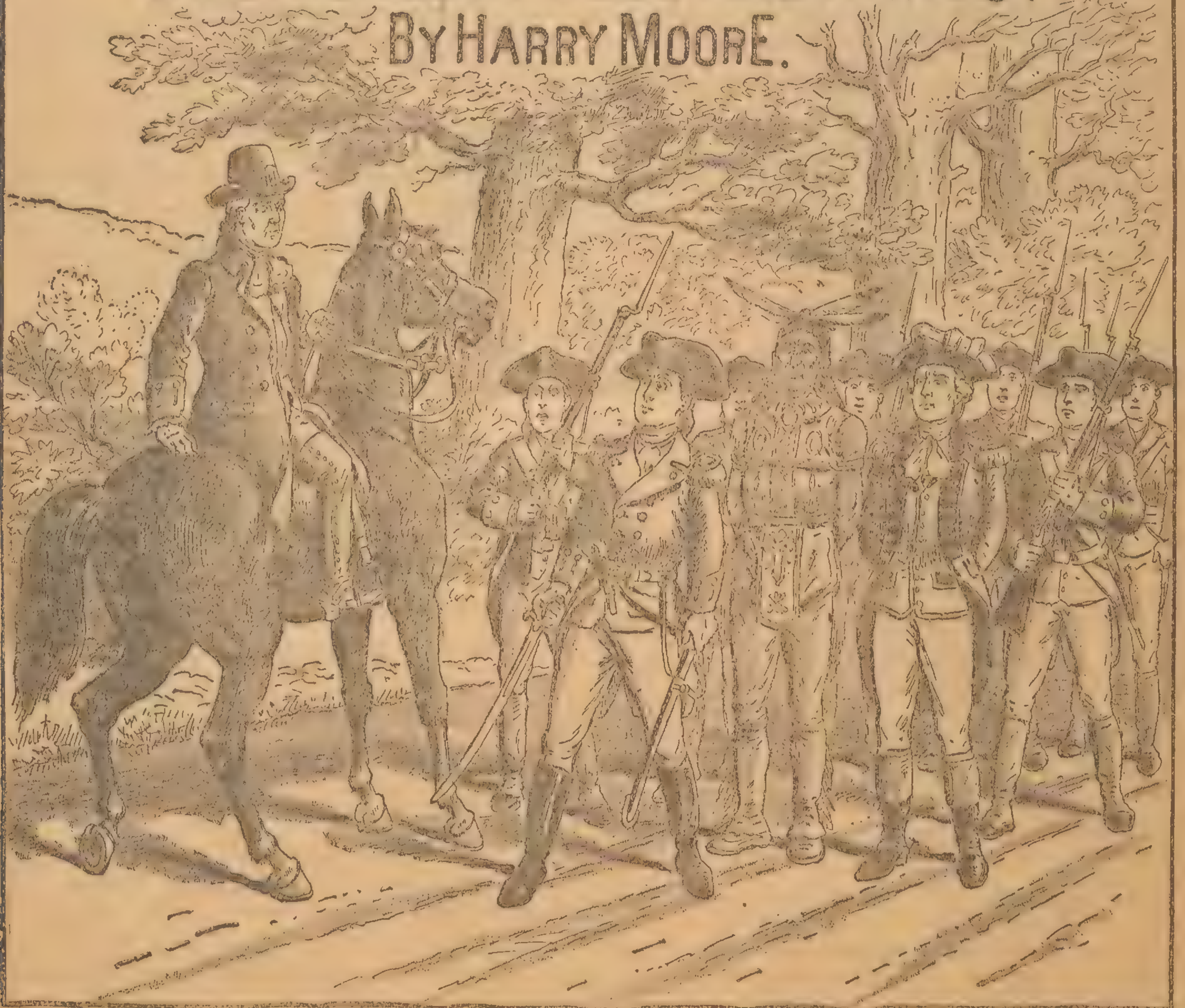
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